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Students gather to watch elections, react to Democratic victories

By MINA RIZK
Contributing Writer

The Middlebury College Democrats hosted an election watch party on Nov. 4 in Hillcrest, which followed gubernatorial races in New Jersey and Virginia, as well as the mayoral race in New York City. Students watched as victories unfolded for Democrats in all three elections.

In New Jersey, Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill won with 56.6% of the votes against Former New Jersey Rep. Jack Ciatterelli. In Virginia, Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger defeated Lieutenant Governor of Virginia Winsome Earle-Sears with 57.3% of votes. Both Ciatterelli and Earle-Sears ran as Republicans.

All eyes were on New York

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SPEAKERS NARRATE ROOTS AND REACH AT TEDXMIDDLEBURY

COURTESY PHOTO / ANDY GOBIN

The four speakers for this year's TEDxMiddlebury.

By TING CUI
Business Director

By 1 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 9, Robinson Concert Hall was busy with students, professors and community members settling in as the lights dimmed for TEDxMiddlebury 2025. This year's theme, 'Roots and Reach,' inspired by Jack and the Beanstalk, invited speakers to reflect on where they come from and what they might dare to imagine.

"We wanted to do something a little playful, a little fun," Josette Chun '25, one of the event's organizers, said. "Using that metaphor of climbing the beanstalk, we wanted to show how your roots — what you're grounded in, your values — guide you on your journey to your reach, that dream or goal you have for yourself."

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Referendum organizers express frustration with rejection vote as SGA forms alternative solutions

By COLE CHAUDHARI
Senior News Editor

On Nov. 5, the senate of the Student Government Association (SGA) voted to reject a student-led referendum concerning rights for protection and free expression on Middlebury's campus, instead announcing alternative solutions to the issues it raises. In response, the writers of the referendum have organized a non-SGA affiliated petition for students to sign.

The referendum, first introduced to the SGA on Oct. 15, initially delivered five demands

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SNEG CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF ENVIRONMENTAL WORK, HOSTS CLIMATE ACTION CONFERENCE

COURTESY PHOTO / ELLA POWERS

SNEG members gathered in Montpelier in January 2024 to protest the state's complicity in "greenwashing."

By LUCY IGOE
Contributing Writer

What started in the winter of 2005 as a J-Term class taught by Jon Isham, professor of economics and environmental studies, has progressed into a flourishing student environmental group that is approaching 20 years of sustainable conversation and climate activism. Having begun with environmental conversations in the Chateau basement, Sunday Night Environmental Group (SNEG) now holds weekly meetings where students gather to talk about climate news and various relevant campaigns that they can get involved with.

In honor of SNEG's 20th anniversary is the "What Works Now" conference, taking place Nov. 13–15 on campus. Inspired by the 2005 "What Works" conference held at Middlebury in 2005, it will feature panels, art installations, keynote speaker and accomplished climate activist Jamie Henn '07 in conversation with college President Ian Baucom, and smaller breakout sessions with alumni. A Thursday night meeting will be open to returning members of SNEG.

"We were focused on institutional memory," Ella Powers '27, treasurer of SNEG and co-organizer of the conference, said. "We wanted to use this as an opportunity to bring alumni back to campus and hear their stories and advice about human activism and how their time at Middlebury and SNEG has shaped their career."

SNEG operates as a "non-hierarchical" collective led by co-presidents Lily Jensen '28 and Claire Emmanuel '27, the other conference organizer. Around 30 students regularly attend SNEG's weekly meetings, while larger events can draw up to 60. Members span from first years to Super Senior Febs, forming what Emmanuel called "a tight-knit community."

"Everyone has a say and we always vote on our decisions," Emmanuel said.

"The main goals of SNEG are to promote sustainability here on campus but also in the broader Middlebury and Vermont community," Powers said. "We normally do breakout groups ... People can choose what they are interested in. Right now some of our campaigns are portable solar, global energy networks and the conference for the 20th anniversary."

Students propose ideas during a "pitch night" about three weeks into the semester. The group then votes on which

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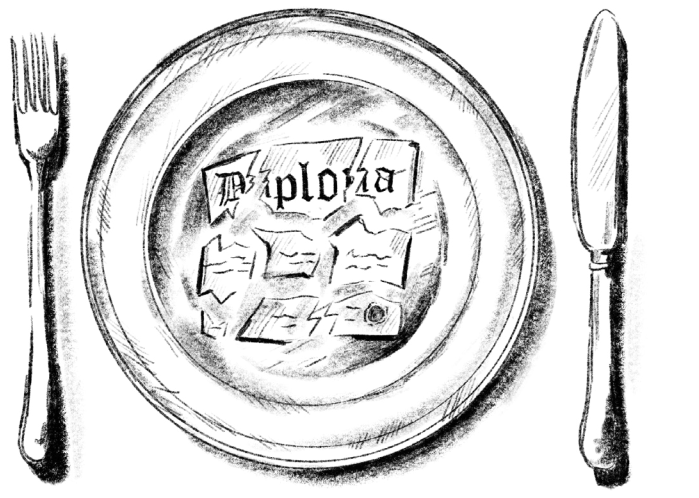
FOOD STUDIES MINOR FACES RISK OF ELIMINATION



ELIZA LIEBO / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

The Food Studies program was created in 2014 after students demonstrated a significant interest in exploring how food systems connect to their larger Middlebury curriculum.

By NORAH KHAN
News Editor

In a plenary meeting on Nov. 7, the faculty-led Educational Affairs Committee (EAC) presented a motion to eliminate the Food Studies minor. The EAC oversees the general direction of the college's curriculum and makes recommendations on staffing and the allocation of teaching resources.

Decreased student interest, a lack of administrative organization and funding restrictions from the Board of Trustees have all been cited as justification for the minor's elimination. If passed, the motion would become effective at the end of the 2025-2026 academic year. Students entering Middlebury in the spring of 2026 or earlier would be eligible to declare the minor, but students entering after the spring would be ineligible. The motion was tabled and will be voted on by faculty on Dec. 3.

Molly Anderson, the professor of food studies who directed the program from its inception in 2014 until she retired in June 2025, said the minor's future has been uncertain since her planned departure. The EAC has not funded a replacement position to manage the program's administrative and advising responsibilities.

"Three times, we submitted a proposal to replace my position, and the EAC turned us down every single time," Anderson said in an interview with The Campus. "We lowered our demands each time, and the final proposal that we submitted was for a visiting assistant professor for three years to basically teach the introductory food studies classes. The EAC decided not to fund that."

The Food Studies program was initially created out of demonstrated student interest.

"It took three proposals to the faculty to accept a minor in Food Studies," Anderson said. "A lot of faculty seemed to think that food studies should be just

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True crime fanatics find community at library podcast club
By DYLAN MCGINTY

Local coffee shop culture attracts college students to town
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By SIMON SCHMIEDER

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SPEAKERS NARRATE ROOTS AND REACH AT TEDXMIDDLEBURY

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Student-run since 2010, TEDxMiddlebury is organized by a small board of students with support from the Innovation Hub and about 30 volunteers. This year's speakers were Molly Solomon, executive producer and president of NBC Olympics; student speaker Mohamed Noor '27; Charlie Sellars, Microsoft's director of sustainability; and Caitlin Myers, professor of economics at Middlebury.

Solomon, an 18-time Emmy winner who has helped to produce 13 Olympic Games, was first on the stage. She began by describing a crisis moment: On Feb. 9, 2022, Mikaela Shiffrin collapsed into the snow seconds into her Beijing race.

"I will never forget this image," Solomon said. "She sits in the snow, her head buried in her arms. I yell out to 'stay on her.'" Despite criticism for not cutting the cameras away, Solomon defended the choice: "Just as glory and medal podiums are central to the Olympic experience, so too is the agony of defeat."

The pandemic-era Games, with their empty stands, tested the Olympics' relevance. Could the Olympics still unite people? Solomon's answer lay in her roots as a storyteller. Over 30 years, she learned that producers create a "secret sauce" by transforming athletic moments into shared narratives. For the Paris 2024 Summer Olympics, her team streamed every event live, amplified athlete voices and made one audacious hire: Snoop Dogg as "chief cheerleader."

"The Olympics must endure," she concluded. "They're about us — the best of us. And in 2028, when the Games return to Los Angeles, we'll have a rare chance to come together again — to cheer and to unite."

Next to the stage was student speaker Mohamed Noor '27. Selected through a student competition, Noor began with a story of growing up in Mandera, a border town in northeastern Kenya often cut off by conflict and poor infrastructure.

"To us, Mandera is the center of the universe," he said. "It's where our dreams lived."

When Covid-19 closed schools in 2020 with no online options, Noor taught himself biology, chemistry and literature through YouTube.

"I didn't know it then, but I was building a habit that would define my life: learning without waiting for permission."

When schools reopened without teachers, he stood at the blackboard himself. He later topped his region's exams and earned a place at Middlebury through the Equity Leaders Program.

"If Mandera is defined by the sun, Middlebury is defined by the snow," he said.

Through the Innovation Hub, Noor received a $10,000 grant to launch Beyond Borders Orphan Aid, funding scholarships for students back home. But one encounter changed him: a mother who lost her baby en route to a distant hospital when the truck got stuck in mud.

"Education saved lives, yes, but it couldn't save that baby," he said. That moment inspired his pilot project, Afra Health Arc, which involves a network of solar clinics and motorbike first responders for remote villages.

His final words brought the room to its feet and earned him a number of congratulations, including from college President Ian Baucom.

Still processing his standing ovation, he reflected on what the moment meant to him. "I'm like a perfectionist, so sometimes I honestly don't give myself credit," he said in an interview with The Campus. "But when I saw the crowd standing up, it was just a very proud moment for me."

After intermission, Charlie Sellars, Microsoft's director of sustainability, spoke next and challenged some common attitudes about climate work.

"When I tell people I work in sustainability, they say, 'Oh, I wish you hadn't told me — I wouldn't have eaten meat in front of you,'" he began. "The prevailing idea of sustainability is guilt and shame. And I'm worried it's counterproductive." The real danger, he said, is "climate doomism," in the sense that the problem is too big to fix, leading to burnout or inaction.

COURTESY PHOTO / ANDY GOBIN

Molly Solomon, executive producer and president of NBC Olympics, discussed how television producers create narratives out of compelling moments in sports to keep audiences enthralled and make coverage more dynamic.

Instead, he proposed a radical alternative: making sustainability fun again. He recalled the optimism of Captain Planet of the 1990s before the 2000s apocalyptic despair. Using life cycle assessments, which he calls a "shiny new toy," Sellars explained that most emissions come not from product use but from manufacturing. Applying that insight to his own book, "What We Can Do: A Climate Optimist's Guide", his team redesigned almost every element — using recycled paper, vegetable inks, sewn instead of glued binding — cutting its carbon footprint in half. "We didn't do it because we had to. We did it because it was a fun design challenge."

His conclusion struck a hopeful note. "If we re-root ourselves in optimism and joy, that gives us the strength to reach for change. If we want to save our planet, let's go have fun."

The afternoon's final speaker brought the theme full circle. Professor Caitlin Myers explored the space between roots and reach, drawing from her own experiences growing up in a West Virginia "holler."

"Last month, I went back to my holler," Myers said. Her father ran a small medical practice in a church basement, and money was tight. The odds that a girl in Braxton County in the 1980s would become a teen mom were 10 times greater than her chances of reaching the top 20% of earners. Still, she made vision boards out of Sears catalogs as she dreamed of upward mobility.

"When I was in the South, I was a liberal in a conservative space. When I moved to Vermont, I was surprised to find that I might be more of a conservative in a liberal one. My politics haven't actually changed all that much, but my context did, and context is everything," she said.

She applies that understanding to her economics research, measuring the effects of abortion policy. After Dobbs, Myers estimated that bans prevented about 32,000 people from obtaining abortions in the first year.

"You might hear that 32,000 women were denied a fundamental right, or that 32,000 babies' lives were saved. Which is it? As a scientist, that's not for me to say." Having grown up among people who view abortion as immoral, she said, "I like them. I respect them. I love them. I think some of them like and love me too. What if we can start there? What if we can start with compassion and respect?"

Myers ended by zooming out.

"Eight in 10 Americans describe politics as divisive, corrupt, chaotic. In Middlebury, 85% voted for Harris; in my holler, 85% for Trump. I know and care about both sides." She urged listeners to embrace discomfort: "There's power in those awkward, liminal spaces. Stand in them. Talk to people. Practice respect and empathy. When that happens, it's a lot harder to dismiss each other."

As Noor earlier reminded the packed hall at the end of his talk, "Your roots remind you of who you are. Your reach tells you what's possible. And the space between them — that's where growth happens. That's what progress really means: when your reach comes home and finds its roots waiting for it."

SNEG celebrates 20 years of environmental work, hosts climate action conference

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campaigns they want to focus their energy on.

"It helps us find direction for the rest of the semester," Powers said.

SNEG has played a central role in student-led climate organizing at the college. The group collaborated with 350 Vermont, Migrant Justice and other local organizations to stage protests such as "No Kings" that encourage community involvement. SNEG also helped lead the college's fossil fuel divestment campaign, Energy2028, which began in 2012 and culminated in the college's divestment announcement in 2019.

"We always talk about that campaign and use it as a marker for how to plan things now," Powers said. "It's a success story that shows us exactly what we're capable of."

Bill McKibben, environmentalist, author and Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury, has witnessed SNEG's growth since its inception.

"Keeping the focus on the environment through cycles of public interest is no small feat," McKibben said. "SNEG has gone from strength to strength, and I've always admired their persistence."

As the group changed and grew over the years, so did the college's environmental studies program.

"I think it's gotten ever deeper as we've come to understand more fully just how the 'environment' is linked with human vulnerability and human development," McKibben said. "New opportunities for study keep opening up."

Emmanuel and Powers have been working on the programming for this week's conference for over a year.

"I am feeling proud and excited," Emmanuel said. "A lot of work has gone into this conference to celebrate SNEG."

"Environment is in our name but back to the very beginnings it was a social justice and climate organizing group," Powers said. "We really try to embrace the intersectionality within the group."

PALME D'OR
FESTIVAL DE CANNES
"A BLISTERING, BEAUTIFULLY DIRECTED MOVIE."
MANOHLA DARGIS, THE NEW YORK TIMES
"AN EXTRAORDINARY REVENGE PARABLE. EVERY MOMENT OF IT ATTESTS TO THE WORK OF A MASTER."
DAVID FEAR, ROLLING STONE
IT WAS JUST AN ACCIDENT
A FILM BY JAFAR PANAHI
NEON
HIRSCHFIELD
HIRSCHFIELD THURSDAYS
THURSDAY NOVEMBER 13TH
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SUNDERLAND LANGUAGE CENTER, DANA AUDITORIUM
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STUDENTS GATHER TO WATCH ELECTIONS, REACT TO DEMOCRATIC VICTORIES

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City, however, for the mayoral election in which New York Representative Zohran Mamdani defeated former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who ran as an independent.

"This was a big election night with some serious implications, at least for Democrats or perceptions of Democrats," Erik Ghalib '28.5, co-president of College Democrats wrote to The Campus. "Many students express concerns regarding issues of which they are passionate about climate change, racial equity, healthcare access, safety for undocumented workers, and support for LGBTQ+ community."

Sarah Buckley '28.5 showed up to the event, wanting to watch the results in real time with other Democrats. As the results came in, she described how thrilling it was to "celebrate the wins of Democratic candidates with people who were just as excited [as she was].

Daniza Tazabekova '26, president of MiddVotes and native of New York City emphasized how important the election felt to a lot of the student body, particularly those living in New York City.

"A lot of students at Middlebury are from New York City," Tazabekova said. "I am pretty well connected with a lot of them and I think the general vibe on campus among students from New York City was that we are pretty excited about what this mayoral win means for the future of the city, and it's kind of refreshing to hear as well."

College Democrats board member Chris Facteau '28 felt positively about what the new wave of victories implicated for the Democratic party.

"The Democrats who won on Tuesday night represent Americans who feel alienated by an administration that promised them the world in 2024," Facteau wrote in an email to The Campus. "However, unfortunately for America, it has delivered anything but. I believe these results reveal an essential trend in our political environment, which the Democrats captured so well: the pressing need for action and families prioritizing their desire to feed their kids, not separate other children from their own families."

Tazabekova added that despite the energy surrounding Mamdani's campaign, many students are also hesitant about what he will be able to accomplish.

"A lot of people are now questioning whether he can actually deliver on his agenda and about half of the students I've spoken to believe he will," Tazabekova said. "Most people don't know that he needs the City Council and the New York State Assembly to enact most of his measures, which looks very unlikely, but people still like him as a candidate and as a mayor because of his energy, enthusiasm and the fact that he brings hope to millions."

Despite being an event thrown by the College Democrats, students in attendance varied in political views.

"We've got people from all across the political spectrum: Republicans, Independents, Socialists, Communists, Radicals, Moderates, and people who have no idea where they fall," Ghalib said.

"We are most definitely trying to evolve the club and its reputation to be more inclusive and action oriented," co-president Lucas Basham '28 wrote. "With freedom of speech debates resurfacing on campus, we feel it especially important to make it clear that Democrats are a space for open discussion and debate. We are also in constant conversation with the leaders of the College Republicans. Disagreement feels more commonplace in the club than it was last semester."

Joseph Jacobson, president of the Middlebury College Republicans, reiterated the same sentiments.

"[The College Democrats] do a great job running their club, and both clubs conduct their meetings similarly, like our Republican meetings, their meetings feature quality analysis and discussion of politics," Jacobson wrote in an email to The Campus. "By collaborating and maintaining a close relationship, the two clubs can uphold an environment of open-mindedness and fruitful discussion at Middlebury in order to best study the current political atmosphere and work towards the common good in American politics."

As the night came to an end, what stood out to some was not just the Democrats' victories, but the atmosphere of open dialogue on campus. For many students, the watch party was more about participation than partisanship.

Editor's Note: Managing Editor Mandy Berghela '26 contributed reporting to this article.

REFERENDUM ORGANIZERS EXPRESS FRUSTRATION WITH REJECTION VOTE AS SGA FORMS ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

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of the college administration: To explicitly reject the Trump administration's funding compact; prohibit the college from sharing resources, including staff time and data collected on students and faculty, with federal law enforcement; provide the Middlebury College community with the resources needed to be safe, including legal assistance with immigration-related matters; revise the Middlebury Handbook to require Middlebury officials to provide proof of their own identity before asking students for identification; and clarify that pamphleting and posting on social media are expressions of free speech, rather than activities that fall under the categories of 'demonstration' and 'protest' as explained in the Handbook policy.

These demands come in the context of increased federal scrutiny of colleges and universities and disciplinary action the Middlebury administration threatened on two students for handing out protest pamphlets on campus over the summer. If passed through SGA, the referendum would have moved on to the entire student body for a vote.

Over the course of further deliberations and debate as the month went on, the five demands shrunk to three. When the referendum went in for the final vote, it was rejected by SGA Senators during a closed door discussion.

In an email from SGA president Nicole Meyers '26.5 to the authors of the referendum after the vote on Nov. 5, she explained the SGA's reasoning for voting against the bill.

"Referendums can be a powerful way to affirm community-wide values. Despite this, the SGA Senate believes that a combination of widespread student engagement, education, and specific topical legislation is a better avenue for change in this case," the email reads.

Senators argued that passing the referendum would be "disingenuous," suggesting that doing so "would imply that work to address these concerns is not ongoing."

"In reality," the email stated, "the administration is actively engaging in the issues outlined in the proposed referendum and is already pursuing policy changes."

SGA told The Campus in a previous article that its leadership had recently met with Vice President for Student Affairs Smita Ruzicka, who shared with them the near-final draft of a new protest and free expression policy for the Student Handbook.

The email also raised concerns about the potential scrutiny a public referendum might draw to the college.

"[A public referendum] could lead to unwanted harm towards vulnerable student groups. Less public, college-community based forms of engagement and education, such as our planned information session, could help address these issues without additional risk," the email read.

The SGA will host an event on Monday, Nov. 17 titled "An Open Forum with General Counsel and Student Affairs," from 4 p.m.-5 p.m. in the Dana Auditorium aimed at facilitating direct communication between students and administrators.

The senate plans to vote on a resolution generally addressing the referendum's concerns later this semester. It will also draft a bill addressing legal support for international students, also to be voted on later in the semester.

In an interview with The Campus, the organizers and authors of the referendum expressed their frustration with the SGA's vote. They think it gestures towards broader issues with the role of the SGA as a mediating body between students and college administrators.

"We never worked with SGA before, so we've been trying to figure out, like, how does SGA work? What's the difference between a referendum and a resolution? And what are the institutional processes through which students, if we have something that we care about, can work with the senators that are supposed to represent us?" Sophia Kahn '26, a co-author of the referendum, said.

"Our goal with it was to engage the broader Middlebury community on these issues that affect us because we know that Middlebury College is making decisions that are affecting our lives, whether it's decisions about giving out student information to the federal government or what counts as a protest or signing on to Trump's Compact or not," Kahn continued. "We believe that students should have a voice at the decision making table, and so we thought a referendum would be one of one way to do that, because by having a vote that every single student can like express their voice through — what else is SGA for? And what we learned throughout this process kind of made us question whether the systems that currently exist for students to express their voice really work."

Kahn and other organizers also expressed frustration over a feeling that the SGA excluded them from key parts of their deliberations over the referendum.

"[The deliberation] was like a back and forth dialogue, which we were glad about. We got to come back to their meetings, and they asked questions and raised concerns, and we responded and we explained why we still believe each point is so necessary. And then they began to have closed meetings where we weren't even allowed to be in the room to represent ourselves," Kahn said.

The organizers of the referendum were particularly surprised by the SGA expressing fear that it would draw unneeded attention to the college.

"We feel like by suppressing student voices out of fear, we're already passively complying. Because if we live in a state of fear where we're afraid of drawing attention so we don't say anything, what does that say about the college community that we're living in right now?" Kahn said.

Charlie Fisch '26, another organizer behind the referendum, framed the need to speak out in terms of accessing students on campus who may feel like this issue does not affect them personally.

"It's true that there are people that are more difficult to access and I think one of our greatest challenges is figuring out how to do that, because it's so hard for all of us to imagine not feeling impacted," Fisch said.

Kahn and Fisch have composed the petition in the hopes of keeping these issues present and circulating in the college community.

The petition, titled "Defend Our Rights to Safety and Speech," is available at go/ourvoice/ and explained at go/ourrights/. It lists the same five demands as the original referendum the organizers originally presented to SGA.

As of Tuesday night, the petition had 126 signatures.

FOOD STUDIES MINOR FACES RISK OF ELIMINATION

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a University of Vermont (UVM) program. It's true that UVM has a really good food systems program and agroecology program, but there are a lot of students who don't want to go into farming, rather things like food policy, international work in food, food economics, who would have been very well served by a food studies minor."

According to Anderson, the number of students interested in the program was growing until she announced her eventual retirement.

"As soon as it became known that I was retiring, the number of students who were opting for the minor dropped, understandably, because students did not know if there would be academic support for them," Anderson said.

She expressed her dissatisfaction at the possibility of the minor no longer being available to students. "I do understand where the administration is coming from but I really am disappointed because we worked so hard," she said.

At the faculty meeting, the EAC shared that they had reached out to departments that have contributed Food Studies courses in the past, and none expressed an interest in incorporating the minor into their department due to how much administrative work it would require their staff to take on.

"Since Molly Anderson retired at the end of the spring, there has not been a director of the minor with expertise to advise students, and there is not a full time compensation number on campus right now teaching food studies courses. Without that leadership, the future of a standalone minor in food studies is uncertain," one member of the EAC said.

EAC members expressed that they ultimately have to make difficult decisions about funding due to restrictions from the Board of Trustees.

"We receive an FTE cap from the trustees every year. That means that the EAC has to make really painful decisions about the basic curriculum," an EAC member said.

At the meeting, several faculty members expressed their disappointment with the motion.

"It's really a shame, especially given the fact that when we think of our location and relationship to the land. We also have issues of food, starvation and food cuts across everything. My feeling is we could have made an effort to keep this program, and rather, we let Molly retire and just let it disappear. I really think we should not lose this opportunity to rethink this," one faculty member said.

Lana Povitz, associate professor of history, teaches one food studies course, "History of U.S. Food Politics." Her research relates to the history of food politics along with social movements and gender and sexuality.

"We can't have [the minor] without a designated anchor. If the program just exists in name, without dedicated resources, then it won't be able to achieve its potential," she said in an interview with The Campus.

Since Anderon's retirement, it has been difficult to maintain the administrative tasks necessary for keeping the minor afloat.

"Molly Anderson was amazing," Povitz said. "As long as she was here, it worked to have at least a minor. After she retired, she wasn't replaced. It is a lot of administrative work to support a minor. Those of us who teach food studies courses are all pretty busy with our current responsibilities — teaching, mentoring, research, existing service roles — so it makes sense that no one was willing to also assume leadership of a minor that has very low student demand."

As it stands, there are four Food Studies minors. One will graduate in 2026, with the remaining three graduating in 2027.

Kana DeCoste '27, one of the current students in the program, thinks it has a lot of overlap with other areas of study on campus.

"As a conservation biology major, the things I was learning about in my food studies courses made the most sense to me," DeCoste said. "It's a perfect intersection of climate action, understanding how social movements and science play out in a very tangible way."

"It's really unfortunate that an interdisciplinary program that meets so many of the college's strategic goals will be eliminated," Anderson said.

With the faculty vote on the motion taking place on Dec. 3, the results remain to be seen.

TRUE CRIME FANATICS FIND COMMUNITY AT LIBRARY PODCAST CLUB

By DYLAN MCGINTY
Contributing Writer

If you stop by the Ilsley Public Library's temporary location in the National Bank of Middlebury on the first Thursday of each month and overhear a group of about 10 of your neighbors talking about a serial killing or a kidnapping streak, know that you can probably still sleep peacefully. They're not planning a murder, nor recounting what they saw in their backyard last night. They are the library's true crime podcast club, and anyone can join them.

Renee Ursitti, the librarian behind the club, leads the group's discussions, using each rotating podcast as an opportunity to dissect the raw facts behind a case. This month, they dished on the first season of "The Clearing," a 2019 podcast following the investigations of April Balascio, who unraveled the truth about her serial killer father, Ed Wayne Edwards.

"We've been going for over a year now, and it's been a lot of fun," Ursitti said.

The true crime podcast club started off discussing events that happened close to home in Vermont that some locals can still remember, such as the Bennington Triangle, an area in the mountains where multiple people went missing without a trace between 1945 and 1950. The group has also discussed a 2001 case in New Hampshire when a few local residents broke into the homes of Dartmouth professors and murdered them. The motives of both of these cases remain a mystery, inspiring much intrigue from those who remember these incidents.

The majority of the podcast club members listen to material and then discuss the crimes themselves in chronological order, breaking down the crime itself and the psychology of the killer. The group's goal is to focus on the facts, uncovering what happened in an objective manner.

Misinformation is common within many of these unsolved crimes.

"Some podcasts are just sensational, they just want people to listen," Ursitti said. "When I started this club, I had to do a lot of fact-checking."

Ursitti was inspired to start the group when she visited the American Library Association National Conference in San Diego last year. She attended a session discussing a club for true crime podcasts that had been successful at another library. She had been looking for programming that would attract younger people to the library, leading her to pioneer the club at the Ilsley.

At December's meeting, club members will have the opportunity to listen to and talk about "The Accused", a podcast concerning a murder that happened in 1978. In January, group members will discuss "Noble," a podcast about a property in Noble, Georgia where 300 bodies were found buried. It narrates the events

COURTESY PHOTO / RENEE URSITTI
Members of the True Crime Podcast Club convene in Mini-Isley to discuss a case.

on the discovery alongside the secrets of the town, including some truly horrific details.

Despite the gruesome topics, the podcast discussions have attracted a wide range of true crime enthusiasts from the local community.

"I have people as young as [college students], and I have people in their 80s and 90s that come on the regular," Ursitti said. The range has surprised her.

Many of the attendees, including Ursitti, are horror movie fans who have been captivated by the emergent true crime genre.

"If you get into some of the more out-there, crazy criminals, they're doing what traditionally has been, to me, a fictional horror movie. They're bringing it to life," Ursitti said.

The true crime genre has become widely popular in the past few years, with interest being shown through podcasts, shows and movies.

"I just read an article in Rolling Stone...about how the true crime podcast genre has become so popular that we now have podcasts that are spoofing it," she said.

Ursitti says she would love to see more Middlebury College students in attendance at the discussions. "You have so many wonderful things on your campus, I know. But I think this is a great opportunity for students to feel more a part of the community."

PHOTOPLACE GALLERY SHOWCASES BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY WITH "MONOCHROME"

By ELISABETH DELLIT
Contributing Writer

Last week, PhotoPlace Gallery hosted its opening reception for "Monochrome," the gallery's newest exhibit. On Friday, Nov. 7, the gallery in the yellow house at 3 Park St. was warmly lit, beckoning visitors in from the chilly evening from 4:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m. People were welcome to view the gallery for free, drink mead and snack on charcuterie boards.

Monochrome will be on display for the public until Nov. 28, Tuesday through Friday from 11:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

The gallery space is intimate, but boasts numerous black and white photographs. The exhibit featured a range of work, from a wall of photographs dedicated to the diverse nature of the West Coast to an image of aged hands weaving a loom. Through the use of black and white, the shadows and lights of the photos popped, allowing patterns to present themselves in new and intriguing ways.

These photographs were first submitted to the gallery and then curated by one of PhotoPlace Gallery's 90 jurors. Jason Landry, an independent curator and photography collector, is the visionary and juror behind this month's collection.

"There is a nostalgic feeling that I get when looking at a black & white photograph," Landry wrote in his juror's statement at the exhibition. "An older photographer that I once represented through my gallery, by the name of Harold Feinstein, told me that a good black-and-white photograph has all the colors of the rainbow. And I guess that's how I see it as well."

Landry looked at over 2,500 photographs for the current exhibit. Ultimately, only 36 photographs were selected.

Kyle Meckes-Gibbon, PhotoPlace Gallery's newest hire, used to manage Vermont's Own Gifts and Goods, a store located in downtown Middlebury. He's lived in town for five years and had visited the gallery's exhibits many times before becoming an employee.

"I think it's a really beautiful style," Meckes-Gibbon said at the gallery's opening reception, reflecting on the exhibit's black and white theme.

In the past, Meckes-Gibbon enjoyed the Trees and Seasons exhibit, which was on display in October of this year. As someone who has rekindled his love for photography, Meckes-Gibbon noted that he is specifically drawn in by the composition of a photograph.

"I think composition is a big factor. And, you know, maybe not the usual frame. An unusual frame would draw me in," Meckes-Gibbon said.

Also present at the exhibit's opening was Alexandre Apfel. Apfel runs Golden Rule Mead, located at 8 Elm St. which, since earlier this year, has supplied the mead tastings for PhotoPlace Gallery's opening receptions.

"On the first Friday, I bring some mead and I offer complimentary tastings of the different varieties that I bring, and people can buy bottles if they want or have a glass while they look around," Apfel said.

As someone interested in photography himself, Apfel was drawn to a photograph titled "The Girl on the Bus to Toledo, Spain." It depicts a young girl, no more than 12, looking back at the viewer from her seat a few rows in front of where the camera is positioned.

ELISABETH DELLIT / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS
PhotoPlace Gallery's newest exhibition "Monochrome," will be on display until November 28th.

> "There is a nostalgic feeling that I get when looking at a black & white photograph."

"I was really struck by the intimacy of that shot. You know, with the caption, especially. When I looked at the image without the caption, I was thinking, OK, this is like someone who the photographer knew [and they] couldn't find seats together, and she was looking back. But the caption makes it sound more impersonal than that," Apfel said. "The idea of letting a stranger take a picture of you and taking a picture of a stranger, there's a real, like, intimacy there that normally I think people shy away from or find transgressive."

Middlebury student Reyan Kassam '29 attended the event and was struck by the photograph "Dunes and Grasses," a snapshot of the Oregon coast.

"What the curator had said in his statement about the contrast of the dunes with the waves and having the kind of conflict of the sand, the sand moving, and then the waves kind of eroding the coastline over time, spoke to me," Kassam said. "You have the sand moving and eroding the land, but the ocean is also eroding the coastline. It's just so beautiful to see how two different things kind of chip away at time."

The collection is one of the many exhibits that the gallery has displayed this year. Every month, PhotoPlace presents curated and juried exhibitions, working with both local and more far-reaching artists. All juried selections are also available online for those who are unable to experience the artwork in person.

PhotoPlace Gallery continues to serve as a diverse gathering place for artists and those who simply appreciate art alike: following "Monochrome," the gallery will reopen its doors on the first Friday of December with another unique exhibition, yet to be announced.

DISTINGUISHED MONOLOGIST BRINGS ONE-WOMAN PLAY TO MIDDLEBURY

By KAI ARROWOOD
Staff Writer

On Friday, Nov. 7, critically acclaimed monologist Deborah Lubar put on her one-woman drama, "If You Were Really There" at the Town Hall Theater (THT). The full-length show, running nearly two and a half hours, was Lubar's first in 25 years, she said in an interview with Zach Shivers, box office manager at THT.

Despite her hiatus, Lubar has had a long and successful career as a playwright, actress and professor. She toured the country, taught theater at both Smith College and Oberlin College, and has written both novels and plays. Her return to the stage was urged on by her longtime director Marianne Lust, after Lubar, believing the show was not yet ready, cancelled previously scheduled performance dates.

While the show was intended as a celebration of aging women, it was also a "love letter" to Lubar's most fervent fans. Each performance was sold-out, attracting an audience of both theater and Lubar aficionados from across the region.

The play's protagonist is a fictional character named Pearl, inspired by actress Judith Malina. Other characters are based on other inspiring women that Lubar has encountered throughout her life.

Although Lubar had begun work on the play eight years prior, more intense rehearsals began three months ago. In her interview with the THT, Lubar shared that she majorly reworked the show when U.S. President Donald Trump was elected to office.

"I just had to go, okay, what is our world now, and what are we going to need? How do I reflect that question in this play?" Lubar said in her interview with Shivers, which has been posted on the THT website. "There are as many answers as there are human beings in this world, there is no one answer, God forbid. The question is renewed every day, and it's not the entire basis for the play, but it's the background for it."

Lust, respecting Lubar's role as a talented playwright, offered acting advice and support without changing the script.

Writing and memorizing a one-woman show is grueling, according to Lust. Every day, Lubar ran through all of her lines to maintain her memory, a process that has gotten more difficult with age. But Lubar has taken it in stride and stepped forward to deliver a stunning performance.

"I think people will be talking about this for time to come," Lisa Mitchell, executive and artistic director of the THT, said.

The audience for both evenings was the best an actor could hope for, one Lust described as "attentive," holding on to Lubar's every word.

"It was sheer pleasure, delight, and awe," Lust added.

Lubar's company, Theater Group Ltd, is one of 12 companies in residence at the THT. Each year, the THT manages over 165 events, making it the "Lincoln Center" of small-town Vermont. The theater has a good relationship with the college, setting up a program that allows students to access free tickets and encourages them to venture off campus to enjoy the performing arts. It unveiled its new wing this past summer, expanding the space for additional programming beyond weekly shows.

COURTESY PHOTO / TOWN HALL THEATER
Deborah Lubar discusses the process behind her one-woman show

"It's a wonderful theater to work in," Lust said. "You feel welcomed."

Looking forward, Lubar and Lust are considering bringing "If You Were Really There" to other theaters. Because of the grueling rehearsal process, Lust said, dates are still tentative. The play may be featured at Dartmouth College, but for now, Lubar and Lust are enjoying the aftermath of a successful return to the spotlight.

Local coffee shop culture attracts college students to town

By SAGE KELLER
Contributing Writer

Every Sunday morning, Lee McKinley '27 is faced with a decision: Which coffee shop fits the day? Little Seed Coffee Roasters draws her in with homemade syrups and a quiet downstairs perfect for focus. Royal Oak Coffee tempts with inventive flavors and idiosyncratic options, such rose-water drinks. Haymaker Bun Company wins when her friends want food, maybe a James Beard Award-nominated bun, to go with their caffeine fix.

"On days where we have to do a lot of studying or homework, we try to make it more fun and go," McKinley said of the weekend ritual.

Each of Middlebury's coffee spots has its own rhythm, serving different parts of the college community for different needs.

At Little Seed, students have found a cozy spot that works as both a hangout and study space.

"The atmosphere is really nice for doing work because they have a downstairs area that's quiet," McKinley said. "But upstairs, you can sit with friends and talk. It's not overwhelmingly loud."

Her go-to orders change with the season.

"If I'm getting iced coffee, I get the iced salted vanilla — it's really good. And if I'm getting a hot drink, I get the orange cocoa. You have to try it," McKinley said.

What sets Little Seed apart, according to McKinley, is the care that goes into every cup, citing their homemade syrups and high quality coffee with thoughtful flavor combinations.

Situated slightly outside of downtown Middlebury's center, Royal Oak Coffee has built a loyal following. Tucked near Fire & Ice, the shop attracts regulars who make intentional trips, rather than stumble in by chance.

"We were trying not to be too niche," co-owner Matthew Delia-Lobo said. "It was just me and my wife. People just want something good."

After 17 years in the coffee business and more than six years spent at this location, Delia-Lobo has built his shop around experimentation.

An example of this trial and error approach is its rosewater and molasses blend, inspired by Middle Eastern flavors.

"It's from anywhere from Morocco to Syria," Delia-Lobo explained. "It's cool because people from those places don't expect it."

Validation from people from the same places as his coffee matters to Delia-Lobo.

"It's nerve-wracking, though," he said. "Someone will be like, 'Hold on, I'm from Syria,' and I'm like, 'Please tell me I did this right.'"

Royal Oak's customer base runs deep after years in town. Delia-Lobo shared that he knows what 90% of customers are going to order after they enter the shop.

Delia-Lobo also explained how the Covid-19 pandemic reshaped the shop's role. There were times when Royal Oak would be the setting of people's only interactions in a day, acting as a lifeline by serving coffee out of a window.

Now, Royal Oak reflects the quirks and creativity of its community.

"I pride myself on accidentally being the most neurodiverse place in town," Delia-Lobo said. "It's a beacon for all kinds of people. Everyone I hire brings something unique."

Located down by Otter Creek, Haymaker Bun Company offers something rare in Middlebury's compact downtown: room to spread out. Caitlin Sausville, the manager of the bakery and cafe, compared the environment to a cruise ship: a place people can eat, study, chat and look out at the water.

"In comparison with other places in town, we have plenty of space for people to come in," manager Caitlin Sausville said. "The whole soccer team came in earlier today and sat on the patio together to celebrate a birthday."

Haymaker's team works hard to build connections with students and locals alike.

"Sometimes we'll memorize a person's order before we memorize their name," Sausville said. "It just means we've gotten to know what makes people happy."

For Sausville, who grew up in a college town, that rhythm feels familiar.

"What's so cool about college towns is that they're constantly evolving," Sausville said. "You feel the small-town vibes, but because of the constantly changing faces that come along with each new student, it doesn't feel stuck. It's able to grow and change."

COURTESY PHOTO / HAYMAKER BUN COMPANY
Haymaker Bun Company, located on 7 Bakery Lane is known for unique bun flavors and inventive coffee menu

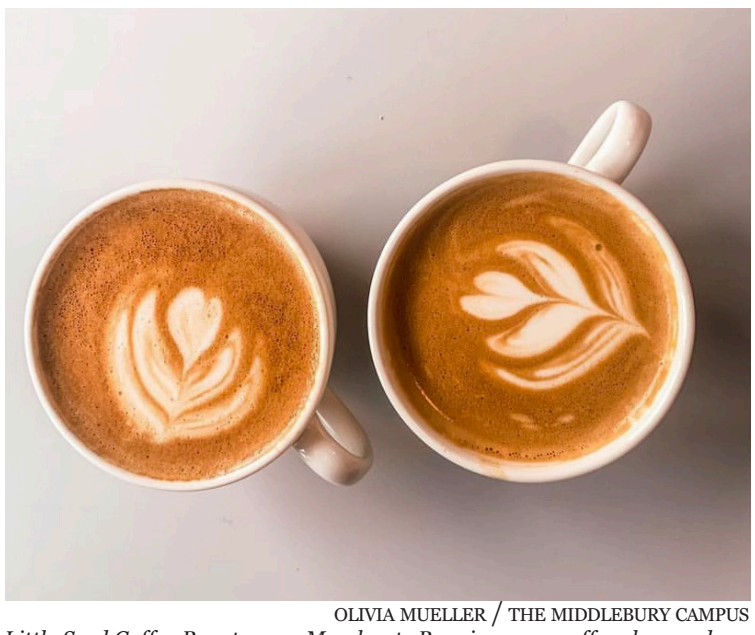
Her favorite part is the community that forms around the counter. She explained that she watches first hand as people take care of each other, noting that a customer even brought her a beret as a gift.

For Eleanor Karr '29, who's from the New York City area, the café culture has made Middlebury feel unexpectedly familiar.

"I was nervous that coming from such a big city, I'd miss that sense of community," Karr said. "But the coffee shops here make it feel like home. You start to recognize people, and it's really comforting."

Throughout town, these cafés have become part of the flow of college life. Delia-Lobo sees the semester unfold from behind the counter.

"You start to notice patterns," Delia-Lobo said. "The same study groups come in every week, and suddenly you realize, oh, it's midterms already."



OLIVIA MUELLER / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS
Little Seed Coffee Roasters on Merchants Row is a cozy coffee shop and popular study space.

For students like McKinley, that flow of people and energy turns a simple coffee run into a weekly ritual.

"Most weekends, my friends and I go to a coffee shop as a treat," McKinley said. "Usually it's Little Seed, but I like to switch it up."

As winter settles in and finals approach, Middlebury's coffee shops will keep the town buzzing, one maple latte, orange cocoa or rosewater creation at a time.

Letter to the Editor: Response to No Kings! Except the ones we like…

Op-Ed

Charlie Fisch and Will Beckerman *are members of the class of 2026.*

In an article critical of the so-called hypocrisy of the No Kings protest in The Campus last week, Ignacio Gamero '26 accused protestors of "cheapening authoritarianism." He argued that other presidents had previously taken similar oversteps of executive power, and that Trump's activities were not unusual for a president. This is a wildly unfair portrayal of previous executive overreach, and trades a disciplined evaluation of democracy for baseless accusations of hypocrisy.

Of the examples provided, one stands out. The Covid-19 pandemic is portrayed as unnecessary and excessive overreach by governors across the country. This accusation ignores decades of public health policy and gives into pseudoscientific narratives that question the danger of a pandemic that killed over 1.2 million Americans. A new, highly contagious, potentially fatal illness constituted an emergency, and the executive branch took appropriate action by following best public health practices. Of all the examples of overreaching executive power to emphasize, the Covid-19 pandemic is not one of them.

What the MAGA base fails to understand is that there is a fundamental difference between restrictions on individual behavior to protect the general population and targeting specific minorities for the enrichment of a wannabe king and his oligarchs. Trump justifies his immigration policy with the same emergency powers used during the pandemic. However, unlike the pandemic, immigration does not endanger Americans' physical safety. It does not constitute a national emergency, nor does it justify the violence and terror used to "solve the problem." People are being taken from their homes, workplaces, and schools in unmarked vehicles by masked officers and moved in secrecy through the immigration system without documentation or due process — all this at the behest of the executive branch. Further, Trump has repeatedly suggested that he will not leave office after his term expires. If that doesn't constitute authoritarianism, then what does?

Trump faces so much dissent because he is a cruel and regressive leader. His many trials, controversies and scandals are not merely vindictive. Look at the U.S.'s Polity score (a way to measure democracy) in Trump's first term: It dropped from a 10 (fully democratic) to a five (anocracy/semi-democracy). Despite evidence of his abuse of power, Trump has retained office and expanded his ability to act outside the checks and balances established by our constitution.

Just because No Kings is not censored does not mean that there is freedom of speech under the Trump administration. Protected political speech, especially pro-Palestinian or anti-Zionist speech, is being censored across the country. International students may not finish their studies because universities are handing their names over to the Trump administration as it pressures institutions to comply with its ideology.

We agree that we should become more critical of our executive leaders and their oversteps of power. However, the claim that actions like Japanese internment were not and are not criticized is not a fair one. Activists condemned Executive Order 9066 and recognized its discriminatory and overreaching nature; Middlebury College even hosts Service Translation, a program that creates accessible media about the Japanese internment process. Activists criticized Obama for his overly harsh immigration policy that increased deportations to record levels, perpetuating inhumanity and violence. Presidents have consistently weaponized government powers to reinforce US imperialism and maintain structural discrimination in domestic affairs. These actions deserve critique and are not justly highlighted in public discourse today. However, our failure to hold past leadership accountable should not justify the failure to do the same for current leaders.

All true overreaches of executive power reinforce global systems of oppression that we seek to dismantle. Regardless of past failures or accusations of hypocrisy, we will always stand up to preserve democracy and create a more equitable world. We have always been outraged, and these systems are just beginning to buckle. Leaders who do not believe in the humanity of all their constituents deserve critique. We will always stand by that principle.

Letter to the Editor: Response to No Kings! Except the ones we like…

Op-Ed

Ayden Lapon *is a member of the class of 2026.*

In the op-ed "No Kings! Except the ones we like…", published in the Nov. 6 edition of The Campus, the author argues that the protest movement across the country is an example of selective outrage, and that the standard for criticism and condemnation is not applied evenly. While I see merit in some of the writer's arguments regarding selective outrage and blind partisanship, I disagree with their interpretation of the protest as merely a symptom of partisan selective outrage. While leaders on both sides of the political spectrum have truly abused the power vested in them and acted in ways contrary to modern ethics, I find myself wondering whether, at any time in history, the gross violations by our leaders have been this public and brazen.

I find the writer's arguments regarding Covid-19 lockdowns as a form of governmental overreach, dubious at best. The 10th Amendment authorized most of the actions. Still, litigation ensued, and the courts, except for in a small percentage of cases, ruled that lockdowns were legal. The writer's argument regarding vaccine mandates does hold significant constitutional and legal merit. However, I struggle to see how a measure intended for the benefit of greater public health constitutes "an expansion of government influence over personal behavior," especially when vaccine mandates have been a disease prevention mechanism in public health policy for over a century and were affirmed by the Supreme Court in Jacobson v. Massachusetts in 1905. Regarding Kamala Harris's selection as the Democratic nominee being largely undemocratic: this issue was widely debated amongst the media and the public, and the situation overall was unprecedented in a modern election setting, especially given the 107 days left until election day. The author made a convincing argument regarding historical abuses of power by former Presidents Nixon, Roosevelt, Johnson, Bush, and Obama. What I struggle to understand is how these examples truly relate, as these actions still provoke significant outrage even to this day. Nixon resigned, in part, due to his own Attorney General's refusal to support him, Bush's legacy was stained by his actions in the aftermath of 9/11 and Obama has faced significant criticism for his actions throughout and after his presidential term.

These arguments fail to convincingly address the writer's core argument about current selective outrage, and the writer struggles to find any circumstance from the past that parallels the present day. A present day in which the President of the U.S. is actively engaged in the prosecution of his political enemies, utilizing his office for personal gain, and engaging in actions reminiscent of early-stage authoritarianism. These actions range from forcing the resignation of a U.S Attorney who refused to indict Trump's enemies which Trump even announced publicly, removing the Associated Press from the White House press pool for not using the Gulf of America in its internationally based publications and often alluding to the wish of running for a third term in complete defiance of the 22nd amendment. These actions are in addition to verbally attacking President Zelensky of Ukraine, threatening and sending the national guard to U.S cities and posting an AI-generated video of him attacking protestors by dumping feces on them with a jet. While I do agree that the outrage towards Trump can often be disproportionate compared to similar actions by prior leaders, his actions frequently set new precedents for executive overreach and, in many ways, constitute one of the greatest reckonings of American political power structures in our history. This is why the No Kings protest occurred, and will likely continue until either President Trump or Congress shifts actions and rhetoric to be more in line with U.S. political norms and the Constitution.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: HOW DEMOCRACIES DIE

Op-Ed

Daniza Tazabekova *is a member of the class of 2026.*

This Letter To The Editor is a response to Ignacio Gamero '26's op-ed titled "No Kings! Except the ones we like…," published in the Nov. 6 issue of The Campus. In his piece, Gamero argued that outrage over presidential overreach is merely inconsistent partisanship and exemplifies selective outrage against President Trump.

Gamero's article is a worthwhile contribution to campus and civic discourse, a strong reminder that, while left-leaning voices dominate Middlebury, there is a meaningful conservative minority. Intellectual diversity is a gift because it allows us to critically reflect on and strengthen our own arguments. While I agree with Gamero that democracy "depends on consistent, evidence-based scrutiny of all authority," I also believe context, nuance and relativity are equally valuable considerations.

The article lists numerous examples of prior executive power from Covid-19 vaccine mandates to surveillance programs, deportations to internment camps, and executive orders from Presidents Nixon to Obama. His argument is clear: if you oppose Trump, you should oppose these policies too. This reasoning is fundamentally flawed because it fails to distinguish between who wields power and the kind of power they wield. We cannot, and should not, treat all presidential actions as equal simply because they involve high concentrations of executive power.

Covid-19 public health measures were temporary responses to an unprecedented global pandemic, grounded in scientific guidance and subject to legal challenges. Furthermore, courts have historically acknowledged that the government's police power — the power to regulate health, safety and morals — is heightened during public health emergencies. One can debate their effectiveness or proportionality, as many on both sides of the political spectrum did. Still, they were ultimately exercises of established emergency public health authority intended to protect lives.

A democracy can survive bad policies, government overreach and the most serious abuses of power. Indeed, President Richard Nixon's list of political enemies and President George W. Bush's warrantless surveillance were met with institutional resistance, investigations and reforms. We survived. Yet now, I share the fears of legal experts, economists and historians about whether our democracy will survive a second Trump presidency.

President Trump's actions represent more than mere presidential overreach – they constitute the systematic undermining of the rule of law, checks and balances and the peaceful transfer of power through elections. Attempts to overturn election results by pressuring state officials to "find votes" and refusing to commit to a peaceful transfer of power are categorically different from vaccine mandates. These aren't policy disputes or even controversial uses of existing authority. Rather, they strike at the very foundation of democratic legitimacy.

As a fellow political science student, I am disappointed by Gamero's failure to understand how democratic backsliding actually happens. From Plato to Steven Levitsky to Timothy Snyder, ancient and modern scholars alike have taught us that democracies decay through the incremental erosion of norms, institutions and processes that make democracy function — all of which President Trump has spearheaded in recent months. Firing senior military leaders, leveraging the Department of Justice to prosecute his political enemies and attacking institutions of higher education constitute such erosion.

Comparisons to "real autocrats" like Vladimir Putin in Russia and Kim Jong Un in North Korea fail to appreciate the idea that democracy dies in silence. Why should the bar for concern be imprisoned journalists, murdered opposition leaders and missing protestors? The time to defend democracy is before it reaches that point, not after. This binary between North Korea and the democratic world erases the entire spectrum of democratic backsliding between healthy democracy and totalitarian dictatorship. Anyone who attended the Political Science Department's Panel can tell you that.

Gamero laments political persecution against Trump in the form of impeachments, investigations, social media bans and ballot challenges. However, this is democracy at work. Impeachment is a constitutional mechanism. Criminal investigations support the rule of law. Social media companies make content moderation decisions. Courts are authorized to hear ballot-access cases. The "No Kings" protest wasn't about partisan preference. It was a call to action to our founding democratic principles – the rule of law, checks and balances and popular sovereignty – and an important reminder that democracy is not a state. It is an act.

HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

The Campus accepts submissions of opinions, reflections and letters to the editor from all members of our community, every week. Pieces from students, staff and faculty are all welcomed for consideration.

Email us at campus@middlebury.edu with your submissions!

STOP POLITICIZING ROMANCE

Op-Ed

Elisabeth Dellit is a member of the class of 2029.

I don't think there's a single person who lives in the U.S. who would say that our country is not going through a significant political crisis. The political conversation is ever-present. But what concerns me is the politicization of our personal lives. In particular, we need to stop politicizing our romantic lives. Going forward, I'll be talking specifically about heterosexual relationships.

In Vogue's recent "Is Having a Boyfriend Embarrassing" article, it's apparent that there's a part of the internet rapidly expanding to be anti-boyfriend. It's also becoming political. With one woman going so far to make the statement, "'Why does having a boyfriend feel Republican?'" And that is exactly where we all, especially women, need to take a collective pause. Since when does romance have political ramifications and connotations?

The ultra-conservative Christian movement is currently on a crusade against single women. So-called "trad wives" are the model women. They're cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children while their husbands are at work. It's a nostalgic 1950s callback to a time where a nuclear family was the end goal of most women's lives.

On the other side of the aisle, liberal women are swearing off men, or at least significantly minimizing men's roles in their lives. They're embracing another form of nostalgia: girlhood – a girlhood defined by a unique feminine freedom. This freedom is centered around female friendships, financial independence, and cultivating a lifestyle separate from a partner. A man, at best, is a nice addition, and at worst, he represents something that prohibits a woman from finding her true self. Liberal women, unlike Conservative women, don't have the goal of marriage, or any form of an agreed upon universal end goal.

As with all discussions that trend online, it's become a black-and-white situation. To feel like a good MAGA Republican, or even Christian, a woman must see herself behind a white picket fence. To be an empowered woman in the Democratic Party means disregarding men.

If we let the comment of "'Why does having a boyfriend feel Republican?'" become so important, we're going to start judging our friends and family by their romantic relationships. We're going to associate moral value with how people conduct their personal affairs, just as we judge a person based on who they voted for in the 2024 Presidential election.

Sitting on the floor in my friend's dorm, these ideas came up naturally. We were discussing what constitutes a feminine man or a traditional male provider and where those two definitions might overlap. As I explained my definition of a modern man provider, my friend jumped in: "Why are you thinking about your type in terms of marriage? Doesn't 'a provider' seem so conservative?"

I think the shock in her statement stemmed from the knowledge that politically I am a staunch liberal – capital "D" Democrat. Yet, somehow, I had drifted to the other side of the romantic political aisle.

Pausing, I asked myself whether she was right. Was I wrong in my belief about relationships? But then I realized that all women need to know: Our relationships are our own – they are private and function according to our needs and those of our partner, not those of a political party. Feminism is the concept of a woman's choice. Women have the choice to work, stay at home, or to live their lives in a way that fulfills them.

There is no black-and-white way to function in a relationship, especially along stereotypical political lines. Political status quo should not dictate how people express love.

Suppose a liberal woman around has a white picket fence, three golden retrievers, and four children; does her "trad wife" nature negate her deep political beliefs and the sincerity of her political action? I hope not.

The same goes for conservatives. A staunch Trump supporter should not be shamed by her MAGA friends for rejecting being a traditional wife or not wanting marriage at all. For me, we already have too much political division to nitpick our political enemies for how they conduct their romantic lives.

At the end of the day, if it is truly a woman's choice and her convictions are strong, then let her define how she relates to men. A woman must have the autonomy to choose.

As women, we already have so many social pressures online and from the people and institutions we interact with every day; We don't need to exacerbate that hate by judging another woman based on her romantic relationship. We don't progress towards a more equitable world when we limit a woman's experience. After all, are men under these same social pressures regarding romance? No. We're just dragging ourselves down.

ELIZA LIEBO / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

SAVE SMALL CLASS SIZES

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

Small class sizes and intimate academic experiences have long been a core tenet of a Middlebury education. The college proudly boasts our 9:1 student-to-faculty ratio and our average class size of 16 on its website and on every tour. But this has not been reflective of our Middlebury experience for years, and the college announced in the spring that it is raising its target enrollment to balance its budget. Maintaining small class sizes may save monetary costs, but at what deeper price?

Our classes that should be small, group-work or discussion-based, like senior seminars, labs and introductory courses, suffer immensely as students crowd themselves uncomfortably into the small classrooms. Some have been asked to bring their own chairs, cramming into rooms not meant to accommodate so many people. This is an especially prevalent issue in increasingly popular departments, and not enough has been done to resolve the issue.

We call on the administration to allow the Educational Affairs Committee (EAC) to create more professor positions and hire more faculty to accommodate the greater number of students on campus.

Small classes and discussions allow students to discuss uncomfortable and personal topics. The success of a creative writing workshop where students are writing about their own lives, for instance, is completely dependent on an intimate group. Difficult conversations and free speech thrive in small classes, and professors engage with students more meaningfully, such as by leaving thoughtful, in-depth comments on papers rather than just a brief blurb at the end. We find ourselves reminiscing about our first year seminars, which included idyllic class sizes and strong connections with our peers and advisor. A class that only lasted our first semester should not be something we feel nostalgic for for the rest of college.

As opportunities for deeper education are lost, so is a critical aspect of our liberal arts education. Students are not pushed to be thoughtful and reflective when they spill out of their classrooms, barely able to speak up in a 35-person class that should have been capped at 20.

Small classes also create accountability. It is much more challenging to skip the readings when there are only nine other people in the room. Small courses push students to meaningfully contribute and engage with material, and in turn students ultimately gain more from the material than they would had they been in a 35 person lecture where half the participants ChatGPT'd the readings. We call on students to be active participants in their classes, engaging with the material and contributing to class discussions.

Professors have done their best to remedy class size issues. Many host extra optional discussions or office hours so that students overwhelmed by their large classes can digest material in a more personal setting. While accommodating the recent increase in the student body is incredibly thoughtful of our professors, it is an unnecessary stressor that neither students nor professors should have to deal with. Most students and faculty can agree that registration cycles are a nightmare, with compromises forced left and right. Departments with consistently long waitlists need to develop better systems for deciding who gets into classes. Professors should not feel pressured to let in extra students at the cost of their own workload and the experience of the students already in the class, but students should not have to feel barred from the courses it is their right to take as a Middlebury student. Each time a professor receives an email from a student begging to be let into their class, the professor, the student sending the email, and every other student in the class are worse off.

The issue of disproportionate class sizes is not only a result of increasing enrollment, but of an increasingly university-style approach to academia that Middlebury has fallen victim to. Middlebury was founded as a liberal arts school famous for its humanities and languages. Perhaps this is why small class sizes are no longer prioritized — the "personal" feel of a small humanities course has become less important than offering pre-professional courses, or funneling students into majors with "better" career prospects and higher salaries. However, that approach could not be less appropriate for Middlebury and its mission. Getting to know your peers and developing a sense of community on our campus is just as important in a lab as it is in a literature class. Shrinking our humanities departments is not a viable solution to a poorly balanced budget.

Therefore, we call on current professors, especially those with the influential position of instructing and advising first year seminars, to remind first year students that generally less popular departments with increasingly smaller class sizes, such as English and Classics, should be embraced, no matter a student's intended major or long-term goals.

We are hopeful that with the arrival of our new president, Ian Baucom, the administration and Board of Trustees can facilitate the hiring of more faculty and consider what minimal enrollments and small class sizes do for each individual student. This is part of what Middlebury is for.

The Middlebury Campus

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SILENCE WILL NOT PROTECT US

Op-Ed

Sophia Kahn *is a member of the class of 2026.* ***Natti Martinez*** *is a member of the class of 2028.* ***Charlie Fisch*** *is a member of the class of 2026.*

Middlebury College's mission statement states that it seeks to "foster the inquiry, equity, and agency necessary for [students] to practice ethical citizenship." Yet, our ability to do so is currently under attack. This is not only a result of the Trump administration's "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education" leveraged at Middlebury in October, but also because of the college administration's conviction that silence will protect us. At a time when our community's rights to safety and speech are being threatened, Middlebury's current systems for the expression of student voice do not seem able to meet this moment.

Earlier this semester, we contacted the Student Government Association (SGA) with a proposal to protect students' rights to safety and freedom of speech on campus. Our proposal included five requests: first, for the college to reject Trump's compact. Second, to provide free and confidential legal resources on issues of immigration. Third, to promise not to voluntarily share student data with the federal government. Fourth, to require Middlebury officials to show proof of their own identity before demanding that students present identification. And fifth, to clarify that pamphleting and social media use are core expressions of free speech protected without restriction by the college.

We asked our student representatives to pass a referendum, which would allow the entire student body to vote on these issues. Over the course of five weeks, we met with our representatives, attended SGA meetings and presented a petition signed by the leaders of various student organizations.

After a three-hour closed-door meeting on Nov. 5 that we were not allowed to attend, the SGA voted against holding a referendum on these five issues. After a discussion with the Vice President of Student Affairs, Smita Ruzicka, the SGA's executive team presented us with a list of their reasons as to why the referendum was rejected. They worried that a vote would be "disingenuous," because administrators were already working on some of the demands we had proposed (however, students and faculty had been unaware of this "progress"). Furthermore, we were told that a referendum would draw too much attention to Middlebury. We wondered, why are discussions of free speech held behind closed doors?

We are deeply concerned about Middlebury's supposed fear of attracting attention. Silence has never protected communities, and it will certainly not protect us now. By suppressing student voices out of fear, Middlebury is passively complying with the erosion of our rights. If we live in a state of fear, afraid of drawing attention, what does that say about the college community we are currently living in? What does that say about Middlebury's mission of "inquiry, equity and agency"?

A referendum would have been a powerful tool to express student voice. It would have shown the sheer number of students who are willing to take a stand on these issues, thereby holding our college administration accountable into the future. Administrators say they are already addressing some (not all) of our demands. But how do we know they will ultimately adopt the changes students call for, especially when the SGA has no direct say in the specific wording or content of changes to the College Handbook? And even if administrators do make the changes we want in a timely manner, who's to say they won't change their minds three months down the road?

Our failed attempt to enact a referendum through our student government raises broader questions about who really makes decisions at the college. Rather than being proactive participants in the formation of college policy, we are being handed down prior decisions and permitted to respond after the fact –– at least, until the meeting becomes closed-door. Decisions are being made that affect our lives, and we deserve to have a voice.

We've already made a start. On Nov. 7, inspired by the Frontline for Freedom movement, we joined hundreds of students on campuses across the country to take action to defend student safety and freedom of speech. Here at Middlebury, we hosted a teach-in. As students spoke about their experiences, we began to notice a disturbing pattern.

Last semester, students in the group Migrant Justice at Middlebury were told they could not use school resources to produce Know Your Rights (KYR) cards. This past summer, college administrators investigated and threatened Ryan Ulen '26 and Violet Gordon '26 with disciplinary action because they handed out pamphlets about the CIA at an informational event. We discussed concerns around what will warrant administrative action, who gets to define protest and how the college should support us in our time of need.

ELIZA LIEBO / THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

At this time of unprecedented attacks on our human and civil rights, it is crucial that our decision makers hear from us. When the current systems for the expression of student voice fail us, we must create new methods of discussion. Meeting this moment will require us to come together as a community to defend our rights to safety and speech through a campus-wide conversation. Talk about this with your friends, in the dining hall and in your own magazines. To join the students who are already organizing, follow @firewall_midd, read our petition at go/ourvoice/ and find a more detailed explanation at go/ourrights/. If we don't take action, who will?

Step by step: bringing people closer

Op-Ed

Maryait Khader *teaches in the Arabic Department.*

Last week, I received sudden and heartbreaking news. My aunt, who was traveling from Qalqilya, Palestine (West Bank) to visit my ailing mother in Jordan, passed away unexpectedly. The news left all of us in shock. Yet, I decided to attend the inauguration of Ian B. Baucom as the 18th president of Middlebury College, because the only way we can truly honor and remember our loved ones is by carrying them in our hearts wherever we go.

It was my first time attending a university inauguration. In Jordan, presidential transitions at colleges and universities were only announced in newspapers — there were no formal ceremonies. The only inauguration I had ever seen was the coronation of the King of Jordan, so I had no idea what to expect—or what to wear. I had left my academic robe behind in Jordan when I moved to Middlebury, choosing instead to pack spices, traditional foods, and my children's favorite toys—things that would help them feel at home in a new country. Without the robe, I initially sat far from the faculty, feeling somewhat out of place.

But as the ceremony began, when I saw Zaraha Moeini Meybodi, the associate Muslim chaplain and interfaith advisor, offer a land acknowledgement, I felt closer and more connected. I laughed so much that I thought I might be disturbing those around me when Professor Julia Alvarez shared, with her characteristic humor, why she wasn't wearing her academic robe. She explained that she had given away all her robes and hoods, and that some had ended up in a second-hand shop where students might even find them to wear for Halloween. Her lighthearted story made me realize that what truly matters is not what we wear, but what we carry inside. I found myself stepping closer to the faculty seats.

Another moment that drew me in was when Dr Jim Ryan spoke about the president. I loved how he described President Baucom as someone who is genuinely himself — laughing, crying, and openly sharing about his family. Family is a central part of my identity, yet in professional settings I often feel I cannot speak about them freely. Hearing that our president values his family and takes an interest in others' families felt deeply authentic to me. It reminded me that sincerity and genuine care are what truly connect people.

Edward Said — a name I had read and written countless times while preparing my thesis, "The Discourse of Displacement in Arabic Literature" — suddenly came alive in the room when Professor Dima Ayoub mentioned him. She references Said because both he and President Ian Baucom share the title 'Out of Place' for their books, which reflect on identity, place, and home. In a way, we are invited to move from being "out of place" into the heart of Middlebury — to make it our own, to build a Middlebury identity that includes everyone, respects everyone, and creates space for all. When President Ian Baucom began reading names, I felt that I had stepped into the very heart of Middlebury.

The inauguration brought me closer to Middlebury, even though this is my fourth year here. It reminded me that what makes a place feel like home is not just the objects, rituals, or familiar items from the past, but the people who welcome us, recognize us, and make us feel part of something bigger.

When I first came here, I chose to leave my academic robe in Jordan to prioritize what I thought my children and family would need in a new home. Looking back, I wish I had brought the robe — but I now understand that the true sense of home, warmth, and belonging comes not from the things we carry, but from the people around us.

COURTESY PHOTO / ANY DUBACK

Ian Baucom's inaguration was Khader's first time attending a college inaguration ceremony.

"What is Middlebury for?" This was the question President Ian B. Baucom asked us to reflect on as a community. For me, Middlebury stands for a high regard for education, a deep respect for human beings, a strong commitment to community and mutual support, and care for the environment and responsible use of resources. Most importantly, it is a place that brings people closer — step by step — helping each of us become an integral part of the community.

BE NOT AFEARD, THE ROOM IS FULL OF TEETH (AND FLUTE)

By ANTHONY CINQUINA
Arts & Culture Editor

"Be not afeard; the isle is full of noise."
- Caliban, "The Tempest"

Full of noise it was, when on the night of Nov. 5 in Robison Hall, the avante-garde acapella octet Roomful of Teeth and composer, poet and flutist Allison Loggins-Hull joined forces to produce 75 minutes of utterly remarkable and deeply moving experimental soundscapes. I have heard nothing like it — certainly not live. If Bach, Phillip Glass and Laurie Anderson were to collaborate it might sound something like Roomful of Teeth. If Stravinsky, Langston Hughes and Erykah Badu did the same, it might sound something like Loggins-Hull. These artists present such an imaginative and eclectic range of sounds, influences and styles that it is hard not to be immediately captivated by the novelty of it all.

Roomful of Teeth had last been part of the Middlebury Performing Arts Series in 2020, accompanied by the Dublin Guitar Quarter. This night's performance was separated into two main sections preceded by a short introduction: "Vesper Sparrow" (Roomful of Teeth), "The Isle" (Roomful of Teeth) and "Friction" (Loggins-Hull, Roomful of Teeth).

"Vesper Sparrow", composed by Missy Mazzoli for the band's residency at The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in 2012, introduced us to Roomful of Teeth's world in just a few minutes. The song is physical and earthly. It is primal, almost tribal. Mazzoli aimed to capture an "amalgamation of imaginary birdsong." Bass and baritone pulse like churning earth and soil: the rhythm section. Alto and soprano flutter above like a host of whistling sparrows: the lead.

"I tried to capture the exuberance and energy of these individual singers as well as a bit of the magic that is created when this group comes together," Mazzoli wrote, describing the piece.

Most of my time listening to Roomful of Teeth's "The Isle" was spent blinking back tears. "The Isle", a Caroline Shaw composition off of the band's 2023 album "Rough Magic", is a collection of five short pieces inspired by William Shakespeare's "The Tempest". The prologue (I) and the epilogue (V) take inspiration from a handful of the play's stage directions, which reference magic, music and noise. These sections are solemn and slow; they build and fade out masterfully. The three intervening pieces each use a different character's monologue as an extended refrain: Ariel (II), Caliban (III) and Prospero (IV). The vocalists play with Shakespeare's language, repeating, refracting, trailing off and looping. The way in which they stretch, bend and unfold the poetry is beautiful. Their delivery is sometimes dizzying, and sometimes incredibly centering.

"The Tempest" is a story about magic, manipulation, dream, sleep and illusion. Shaw's composition and Roomful of Teeth's performance meets the play where it is: on the ethereal plane. Their sound is large and majestic, frequently flirting with the angelic hymn or romantic cantata.

The music can also be elusive. Gorgeous, ephemeral melodies slip in and out of the greater soundscape. Searching for those subtle sounds is its own game, and when you catch one you'd better grab it and hold on, because it will take you somewhere otherworldly.

But the greatest parts of the performance was when the whole octet sang together, with perfectly unified resolve, producing sound unbelievably rich and deep. The first time they really came in all at once – at the end of the "The Isle's" prologue – I heard a smattering of audible gasps from the crowd. They don't overuse that sound, so when they do pull it off, it feels all the more special.

Loggins-Hull is a multi-talent: composition, poetry, instrumentation, voice, electronics, production – it seems as if there is not much creatively she is unwilling to explore. In her newest work, the song cycle "Friction", Loggins-Hull combines all her talents and – with the help of Roomful of Teeth – creates something fascinating.

Conceptually the work is poetic, visual, abstract, and persistently autobiographical. She incorporates interesting electronics, samples and pre-recorded loops in her music, creating a lush and sometimes haunting background for her flute playing, her poetry and Roomful of Teeth's accompaniment. The energy bounces between psychadelia, classical, jazz, and experimental electronica.

Loggins-Hull plays with the elasticity of noise: flute, vocals, and electronics melt into each other and become one, sometimes indistinguishable sound. There is both a consonance and a constant dissonance in her music; it challenges the ear and compels you to make sense of her complex world.

Her poetry does the same. It is stirring, aggressive and industrial. In the song "Token", which feels like the climax of the cycle, Loggins-Hull stomps on her vocal effects pedal and her voice drops an octave, distorts and doubles. "None of the girls are black," she repeats as the central refrain, exploring what it means for her to grow up and live as a black woman in America: the kinds of questions she has had to ask, and the answers she has felt forced to give.

Much of the song cycle adopts this tone–introspective, uncompromising and dark. But there is hope too. In "The Thread", Loggins-Hull loops a sample of her father speaking to her from his hospital bed: "The thread in the Loggins family was always music." The song teeters on the edge of rhythm and blues. The production is modern and groovy, while still maintaining the experimental tendencies of the rest of the cycle.

I am moved by the ways in which we can find harmony between such varied forms of expression. When Loggins-Hull first picked up her flute as her intro song "Neuro" began, it really hit me: Here is a woman, classically trained on the flute, influenced by the amazingly rich black American music tradition from jazz to blues, who incorporates experimental electronics into her sound, and who samples King Crimson and Stravinsky; and behind her is a band whose sound draws from (among much more) Korean p'ansori, Inuit throat singing, Sardinian folk, and Western classical tradition, and who just performed a composition inspired by the poetry of Shakespeare. For me, it was a moment of gratitude. I am constantly amazed at the richness of human history and the unbelievable range of artistic expressions. When someone is able to sift that diversity down into a single vision, to make some sense of that undefinable, beautiful chaos, they achieve something remarkable.

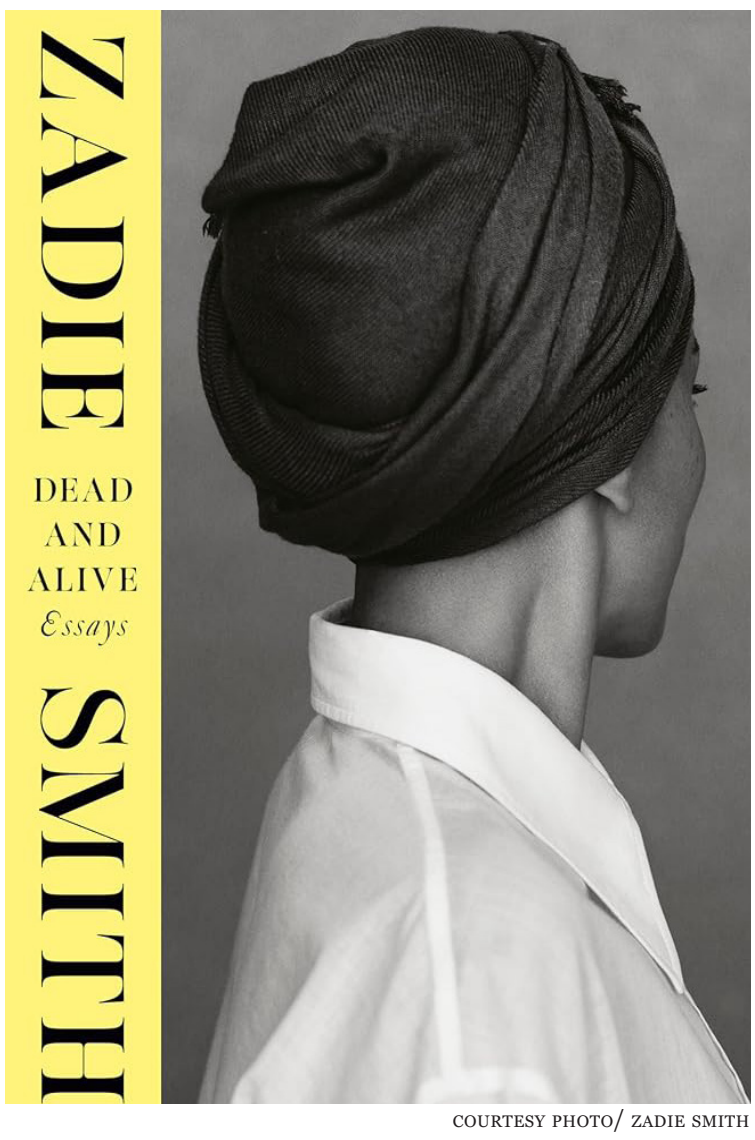
COURTESY PHOTO/ PERFORMING ARTS SERIES
Roomful of Teeth and Allison Loggins-Hull's finale on Nov. 5.

A RESISTANCE OF FORM: ZADIE SMITH'S "DEAD AND ALIVE"

By NICK PENNIMAN
Contributing Writer

"But perhaps I am asking the question the wrong way around," Zadie Smith writes at one point in her essay "Fascinated to Presume: In Defense of Fiction," which can be found in her new collection, "Dead and Alive." It's a typically Smithian line: an expression of self-doubt signalling the arrival of a new insight whose veracity you, the reader, will likely not doubt at all. What follows, you know, will only further illuminate the subject at hand (and will only be followed by another moment of illumination). The many "but"s in Smith's essays — the "though"s and "what if"s and "maybe"s — are what you come for, the mark of a writer who stands in pointed opposition to the kind of thinking rewarded in the social media discourse which has become the only real stand-in for our public one.

In a time when a lot of essays — even those that appear in the once-vaunted magazines with elegant names — read like extended X posts, reading Smith can feel like interfacing with a consciousness from sometime before the Fall, before the 2004 day when that one Harvard sophomore launched that one website. Hers is a voice in contact with, but untarnished by, all the intimate bullshit of the current moment. We hear the sound of a legitimately vibrant, socially-conscious mind — the kind of mind we all want, and want to know in others, and deal a hammer blow to every time we take our phone out of our pocket and congeal in the glow of its "deathly Palo-Alto-Late-Capitalist-consciousness-colonizing-sickly-blueish-light" (as Smith's phrase goes). To write a big-subject magazine piece that's not just "deeper than an X post," but everything an X post is not — something that indulges every impulse X discourages — how about more people try that?



COURTESY PHOTO/ ZADIE SMITH
Zadie Smith's new collection of essays "Dead and Alive" was published on Oct. 30, 2025.

Author Claire Messud wrote of Virginia Woolf's approach to essay writing that it is "the more authoritative for never being authoritarian." So it is with Smith, on whom Woolf's essays are a clear and stated influence. What both writers offer is not so much the verdict as the hearing — not the consciousness unfolded, but the actual process of its unfolding. When it comes to hot-button issues (cultural appropriation in "In Defense of Fiction," warring generational ideas about art in her piece on the film "Tár"), Smith doesn't so much "cut through the shit" as circumnavigate it, touching only the edges, grace intact. Sometimes a bit of righteousness breaks through — and sometimes you want more of it; grace-before-all-else can be annoying — but the rigor is always in the self-effacement. After ending one sentence with an exclamation mark, Smith writes: "And immediately, within that bumptious exclamation mark, an internal voice notes the tell-tale whiff of Baby Boomer triumphalism, of Generation X moral irresponsibility."

Or take a condensed version of a few pages from "Some Notes on Mediated Time," one of three new essays in the collection, in which the self-propelling nature of Smith's doubt is on full display. First, a fatalistic assertion about the effects of social media on young people: "Soon a teen boy, like a teen girl, will be nothing more or less than what can be seen and judged externally by a camera, and presumably will then develop the same embattled, fragile sense of self that is by now native to teenage girls, and ripe for exploitation by data sets . . . " Then, a challenging of that assertion: "And yet. I do think that pretty much anything can be metabolized by humans . . ." Then an obvious dissatisfaction with that idea: "And whatever is lost in the transition? The capacity to be bored, alone, private, un-nudged. . . " Then a pulling out of the spiral, and a kind of surrender: ". . . in the end what's the difference? Besides, cats do not go back in bags. Nothing is going to get un-inverted here . . ." But then another push, couched in a footnote: "Although there does seem to be a paradigm shift here. Most mediating devices, after a while, are metabolized by the majority . . . while leaving a smaller proportion of people behind, locked in for life. The thing about the phone is that it's everybody. One hundred per cent capture . . . " And then, soon enough, a return to the point she made nine pages ago: "Anyway, I digress."

If this sounds tedious, it's mostly not. Smith isn't so much flip-flopping between positions as weighing them in her palm, trying to get a good look at them. One can see Smith as someone walking through a mental hillscape, finding new amalgamations of earth, tree and sky as her sightline changes. Many writers choose one spot and describe the view. Others, envious of Smith's style, might seek to demonstrate their range of movement, but mistake the task as picking a single hill and climbing it — better to get the highest view and achieve the ultimate, complete perspective. But that's not often the perspective in which Smith is interested. And besides, with the uphill struggle towards the single peak comes the feeling of a certain kind of dumb, single-minded effort — the sound of panting. Reading Smith, the pleasure is in the sense of effortlessness.

All of this, for Smith — the self-doubt, the absence of snark, the roving perspective — is a natural result of her day job as a novelist, as she would be the first to tell you: "Fiction—at least the kind that was any good—was full of doubt, self-doubt above all," she writes. Her disposition isn't an affect deployed for the appearance of open-mindedness, but a result of her constitution, bolstered by years spent at her desk imagining other lives. It's as if she can't do it any other way. Humanism — a mushy word in any time, but regarded as particularly antiquated, if not risible, by many today — is the strain that runs through all of these essays, repeatedly making the case for itself in varying guises, reminding us what exactly it means, how exactly it might be applied.

For more than a decade now (see: her 2012 essay "Some Notes on Attunement," which orbits around Joni Mitchell) Smith has been making a case in her essays about how this particular "ism" is perhaps more important than others when it comes to questions of art and identity, and she seldom misses an opportunity to take it up. Even in what could have been a brief introduction to the section of the book comprised of obituaries, Smith reminds us that, while she didn't always share the same beliefs as some of her late friends and influences — she points to Martin Amis's view of "The War on Terror," Joan Didion's musical taste, Phillip's Roth's vision of women, Toni Morrison's committed Catholicism — "Whenever I consider the very many writers who have left their mark on my writing in one way or another, I am reminded that you do not need to be perfectly aligned with someone to be in their debt."

While Smith seems to see her mode of essay-writing as the one she is "stuck with," she also knows that its shadow mode of thinking is in particular need of defending these days, that the forces working against it — whether they come from Palo Alto or the Trump White House or (and no suggestion of equivalence here) the progressive college campus — are increasingly strong.

It's that first camp with which she is understandably most concerned. As Smith writes in a recent New Yorker piece: "My essays tend to employ a lengthy and sometimes oblique way of thinking that can appear out of step with the more direct forms of address presently favoured by the algorithm. I think this is why I've ended up writing so many of them, despite never setting out to be an essayist. They have been my own small way of resisting it. I mean, the algorithm. If not thinking through it, with it, or on it." You might call it a simple idea, a narrow effort — but who could say it's not a necessary one? Who could say, actually, that it's not as vital as any right now?

BEING A WRITER AT THE MONASTERY

By CHRISTY LIANG
Arts & Culture Editor

I spent the past weekend at Zen Mountain Monastery in Woodstock, NY, where Professor Waldron from the Religion Department gave a workshop on The Buddhist Unconscious: Yogācāra Buddhism and How It Illuminates Bias.

New to the monastic setting, I felt briefly transported to a sacred and misty world reminiscent of "The Lost Horizon." The rules and pace of conventional society were temporarily lifted, replaced by a decidedly inward energy. No one was rushing anywhere but looking to arrive within themselves. Before going, I had hoped for the swirling thoughts and feelings inside of me to settle into some kind of discernible pattern. That, however, did not happen. In the company of fellow seekers and sufferers, I seemed to have realized just how much of a writer I am. For one thing, I kept repeating to people who asked: "I want to be a writer;" and "I live my life as a story."

Mischief is, of course, everywhere. My first dinner at the monastery was out in a wooden shed with a couple of guys in their early twenties trying to figure out life. It was their secret smoking spot. We talked about suffering in the rain. At that very moment, I felt simultaneously embedded in life and removed from it, all the while reflecting on how I so often live for the aesthetics of experience — how I feel more drawn to the feeling of being in a monastery than to the actuality of it.

People from drastically different life stages and backgrounds met with immediate sincerity and vulnerability. A simple "Why are you here?" could get a whole world to open up. Instead of gathering catalysts for some spiritual insight, I walked away from the weekend with a rich bundle of revelations, mystical experiences, and tortured inquiries — the raw, intimate "stuff" of other people's keenly examined lives. This aspect of connection and mutual recognition was, to me, far more affecting than the heavily ritualized and overtly ceremonial monasticism itself.

The daily structure was highly regimented. My day started at 4:55 a.m. and ended at 9:30 p.m., with extensive meditation and chanting sessions, as well as distributed chores in between. Having only a weekend to acclimatize, I found the formalities of sitting and chanting verses in a group for designated periods of time constricting rather than illuminating; I have felt more connected to my interiority and to the elements meditating under a tree somewhere along the TAM.

One thing was for certain: With everyone I talked to, I got to know myself better. Perhaps it was the unwithheld sincerity, the clarifying mountain air or the psychological depth that people are willing to descend to before they even learn your name: in response to questions and comments from other people at the monastery, I said things that were extraordinarily revelatory about myself, as if they were finally prompted to manifest from the substratum of my mind.

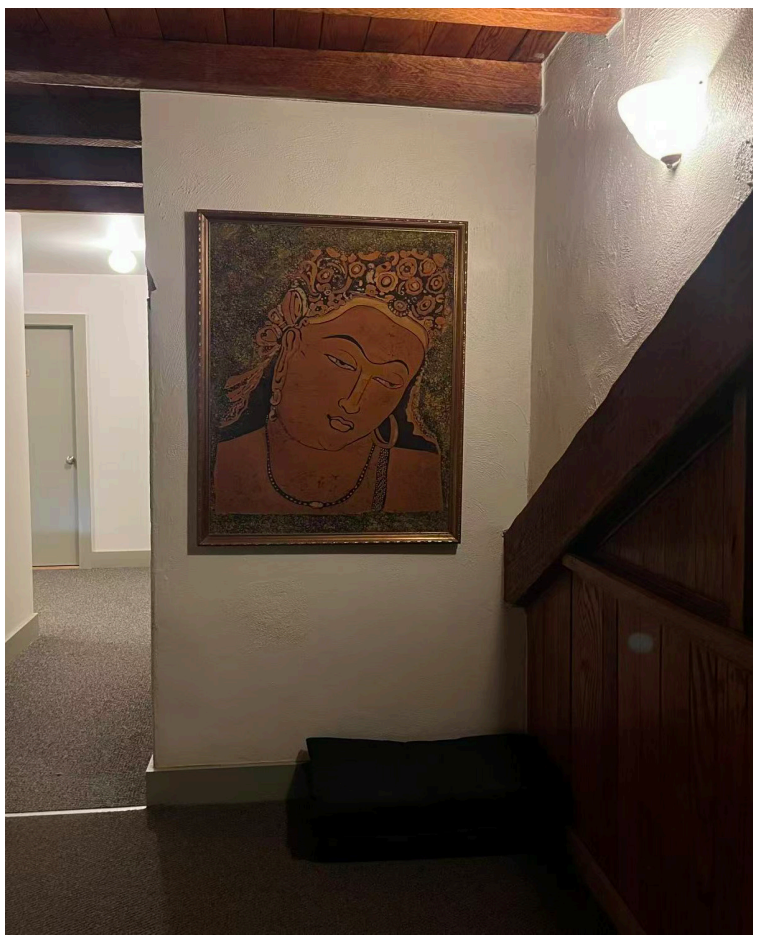
On my last morning, I realized while meditating that it's okay to be confused, that I should approach life in all its raggedness and randomness with a kind of perceptual immediacy (which allows me to be intimate with life) accompanied by infinite empathy (which allows me to behold and accept all phenomena with compassion).

I was reminded of my favorite passage in To the Lighthouse by Virginia Woolf: "What is the meaning of life? That was all a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years, the great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead, there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one."

I had come to the monastery searching for something akin to "the great revelation." I left, instead, with a deeper understanding of myself through connecting with others — all of us caught in this beautiful web of knowing and being known.

"What's your relationship to the part of your story that you can't write?" A woman who, like me, wanted to make meaning and bridge worlds in her youth, asked me.

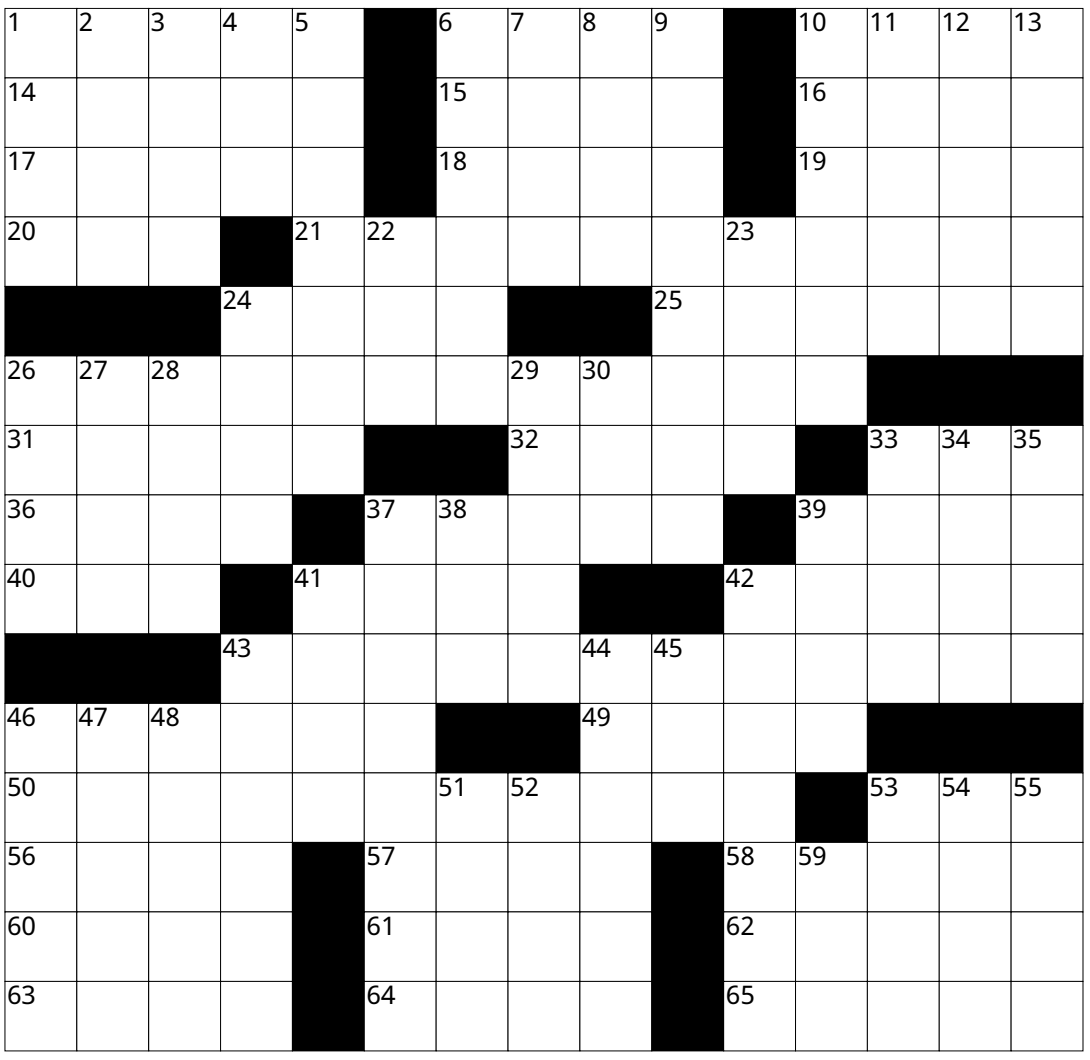
"I'm in hopeful anticipation to it." I said, delightfully surprised by my own words.



CHRISTY LIANG/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS
A picture from inside the Zen Mountain Monastery.

You've Got Mail!

Avery Goldstein



ACROSS
1 Top story
6 Locks
10 Drops in the air
14 Dutch cheese
15 High point
16 Feed the kitty
17 404 Not Found, e.g.
18 Called
19 *Monday's weather in Middlebury
20 Nemo, to Marlin
21 2012 Imagine Dragons hit
24 Double agent
25 Dissertations
26 Something to wish upon
31 Piles
32 Interpret, as tea leaves
33 Evil
36 Dumbo's "wings"
37 Crossword diagrams
39 The stuff of legends
40 Tags on Twitter
41 Weight of a paper clip, roughly
42 Sixteenth of a pound
43 *Poetic phrase for deep darkness
46 Kidney-shaped nut
49 With 5D, side dish popularized by "Forrest Gump"
50 Restored communication
53 "Totally tubular!"
56 Broadcasts
57 *Neither 19A nor 53D nor 27D nor 43A stays couriers at this org from the swift completion of their appointed rounds
58 ___ to the finish
60 Full house, in poker slang
61 H.S. exam
62 Coin toss call
63 Totals
64 Meh
65 Emotion in "Inside Out 2"

DOWN
1 Improves, as wine
2 Spanish bull
3 Zig or zag
4 Chapel vow
5 With 49A, side dish popularized by "Forrest Gump"
6 Solidify
7 Smoothie berry
8 "___ expert, but ..."
9 Crew races
10 The "M" of MBA
11 Civil rights leader Roy
12 Kitchen appliance
13 Lauren of "The Love Boat"
22 Boxer Muhammad
23 Neighbor of Sudan
24 Janitorial tools
26 ___ butter (lotion ingredient)
27 *Spiciness
28 Two in a row?
29 Fairy tale brother
30 But, in Latin
33 Pot holder?
34 St. Louis attraction
35 Off! ingredient
37 Adults
38 ___'s Homemade pasta sauce
39 San ___ Obispo
41 Secluded valley
42 Together at the Marquis, say
43 Abruptly stops texting
44 Decides one will
45 Service charge
46 Crustaceans that typically walk sideways
47 Vowel quintet
48 "Get lost!"
51 Canadian gas brand
52 Tax pros
53 *Pour
54 Rights org.
55 He loved Lucy
59 Sprinted

Tapped-in: alpine skiers and the game of speedball

By SIMON SCHMIEDER
Senior Sports Editor

SIMON SCHMIEDER/ THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Sara Paradis '27 attacks the goal from point-blank range

Odds are that if you've ever looked into the Virtue Field House around 5:30 p.m. this time of year, you've been captivated by all the action. Pole vaulters doing backflips on the mat, sprinters flying around the tight corners of the indoor track and throwers catapulting heavy objects towards a net make for quite the spectacle. What's always captivated me the most, though, is the center-stage act of this Virtue circus: alpine skiers playing speedball.

In this issue of Tapped-in, I watched a speedball match and spoke with the skiers to better understand the sport and decipher the chaos.

Speedball is a combination of soccer, handball and football. Assistant Alpine Skiing Coach Parker Acosta explained that the variant played by the ski team has European origins and is common among the broader skiing community.

"Many members of the Middlebury squad have been playing [speedball] their whole life," Acosta said.

Players can dribble the ball with their feet, and if one is particularly skilled at soccer, they can even keep the ball on the ground and weave their way through the opposing team, Messi-style. In order to possess the ball in your hands, another player must kick the ball in the air for you to directly catch it; you cannot simply pick up the ball or scoop it to yourself with your feet.

Once you are holding the ball, the opposing team can tag you. If tagged, your team loses possession and play restarts with the opposition. Unlike handball, players can take as many steps as desired with the ball in their hands, so long as they remain untagged. Because of this rule, a common strategy is to catch the ball and advance up the field as far as possible. Once a defending player approaches, you drop the ball right before they can tag you and start dribbling.

To score points, players must topple the "goal" on the opposite side of the field with the ball. The "goal" in question comprises three ski course poles tied together. Resembling the frame of a teepee, the structure stands precariously at each end of the pitch, and depending on a team's lineup, a goalie might stand guard in its vicinity.

The primary ways of knocking over the goal are kicking and throwing the ball, and shots can be taken from anywhere on the field. In last Thursday's game, one skier scored from a 30-yard threaded finesse shot, glancing the side of the goal and bringing the structure to a slow, demoralizing collapse. Another caught a pass from deep, receiving the ball well past the final defender and knocking down the open goal. On that note, once the goal has been struck, there is no saving to be done — the defense must watch on as the formation falls and sprawls out on the turf.

After a team has been scored on, the direction flips and they march to the opposite side to defend the other goal. The scoring team punts the ball, bracing their defense as the receiving team regains possession and charges back up the field. As the team drives forward, the ball is only considered out of bounds if it has slipped through a gap in the netting and traveled onto the track or adjacent field. Otherwise, unlike playing soccer on the indoor turf in Virtue, the ball can strike the surrounding net and remain in bounds.

Depending on one's style of play, the ball typically spends 40 to 65 percent of its time on the ground. For skier Sebastian Segre '26 — an experienced soccer player — an effective strategy is to outskill the defense, get in proximity of the goal and fire a shot at the first opening. Tommy Carnahan '29 plays the game more like football, catching the ball, driving towards the goal and making quick cuts to juke defenders.

To the spectator, speedball is hectic and riveting. To Sara Paradis '27, speedball is "intense" and "aggressive." And to the alpine ski team more generally, speedball is actually just a pre-lift warmup.

"It's so much better than just running a couple laps around the track," Milan Novak '28 said.

Sophia Palmquist '29 agreed. "Definitely the ideal pre-lift."

Compared to more conventional dynamic stretching, speedball builds team chemistry, and is an engaging way for Middlebury's downhill skiers to warm up together.

"The team aspect" is Carnahan's favorite characteristic of speedball. "It's great to get the team playing a game before we warm up."

House music thumping and track runners flashing by, last Thursday's spirited game of speedball was perfectly situated within Virtue's high energy ecosystem. Middlebury's skiers demonstrated various ways to master the sport, incorporating soccer nutmegs and touchdown receptions into one compelling performance. The competitive spirit befitting of a Middlebury skier was also on display, and though the team

HOPE REMAINS FOR WOMEN'S SOCCER DESPITE SEMIFINAL LOSS TO WILLIAMS

By JULIA RANDOLPH
Contributing Writer

COURTESY PHOTO / MICHAEL LAST

Under the lights, Lauren Tracey '29 rips a shot for the Panthers

This past Saturday, the women's soccer team battled #12 Williams for a chance to play in the NESCAC championship. The two teams had met just a few weeks ago, with Williams taking home the win. The Panthers, eager to advance in the tournament, put up a strong fight against the Ephs, yet they fell short once again.

Saturday's game started with Middlebury asserting themselves early. In the second minute, Midfielder Gigi Day '27 nearly capitalized off a corner kick from Stella Espinasse '27, but Williams' goalkeeper was quick to respond and defend the shot attempt.

Back and forth action saw the Panthers and Ephs peppering the goal throughout the first half. In the 34th minute, Williams secured the early lead when Williams Elle Long slipped the ball past Middlebury's senior goalie, Livia Davidson '26.

A mere five minutes later, Williams almost scored again — key word, almost. Middlebury stood their ground on defense and bent, but didn't break.

Heading into the second half, the Panthers shuffled their positioning.

"We switched into a formation that had a four back in hopes of getting more width and relieving some of the pressure on our backs," midfielder Taya McClennen '28 said.

To the Panther's dismay, the Ephs recorded their second goal in the 70th minute.

Now down 2-0, the Panthers fought for a lifeline. This drive propelled them to score in the 88th minute, when Lauren Tracey '29 snuck one past the Williams keeper, cutting the deficit to one.

With a minute and half to play, Middlebury was desperate for a goal to extend their season.

However, the Ephs played keep away until the end, shutting the door on Middlebury's NESCAC tournament.

As the defeat hung over their shoulders, the squad could only hope their season was not over. To be sure, the Panthers have played remarkably well this season despite having graduated 15 seniors last season and taking on 14 first-years.

"This is our first season since 2021 making it past the quarter finals," McClennen, who boasts a squad-best four goals this season said.

"Even though we lost in the semifinals, I am proud of what our team has overcome and proven thus far," Goalkeeper Frankie Marston '27.5 said.

Despite the loss, the team isn't done yet. On Monday, the Panthers learned they will host Westfield State University this Saturday at 11 a.m., on the path to play in the NCAA finals.

Regardless of being in unfamiliar territory, the Panthers are expected to put up a strong fight. Ranked third in the NESCAC and 12th in last week's National Poll, the Panthers also hold the second highest shot count in the NESCAC and the second fewest goals against.

"We plan to keep taking it one game at a time, like we've done all season," Davidson said. "I am truly grateful to Williams and every team we've played so far, showing us where we can improve our game."

The future is bright for this squad, and eager for redemption and reward, the Panthers have the drive to go far in this tournament.

WINTER SPORTS PREVIEWS 2026

By TING CUI, KANAN CLIFFORD, THEO MANIATIS & SIMON SCHMIEDER
Sports Editors, Senior Sports Editor

Women's Basketball

Head Coach: KJ Krasco

Athletes to Watch: Calie Messina '26, Brooke Collins '26, Teagan Lind '28

Following the loss of three key starters, including all time scoring leader Alexa Mustafaj '25 and NESCAC-leading rebounder Augusta Dixon '25, Middlebury women's basketball needs to bounce back with a strong start to the season. After finishing the regular season 1–5, the Panthers lost to Colby College 100-97 in a 2OT heartbreaker during NESCAC quarterfinals. With returning senior starters Messina and Collins pacing this group, however, this team is looking promising. They must rely on the underclassmen to provide a spark this year – with forward Lind and guard Sarah Chenette '28 expected to contribute strong minutes this year.

Key Competitions: Norwich University (Home– Nov. 18), Trinity College (Away– Jan. 9), Amherst College (Away– Feb. 13)

Men's Basketball

Head Coach: Matt Goldsmith

Athletes to Watch: Kuba Cwalina '27, Edward Witherington '26, Evan Flaks '26

As Middlebury men's basketball prepares for the start of their season, new head coach Matt Goldsmith takes the helm – following the retirement of 28-year veteran coach Jeff Brown. On the court, the loss of defensive stalwart center David Brennan '25 and his team-leading 11.4 rebounds per game looms large. For a group that finished 10th out of 11 in the NESCAC in defensive points allowed, playing fundamental defense is necessary. They also must improve the turnover margin, finishing last in the NESCAC with 12.6 turnovers per game, while only forcing 9.5 per game. To break into the playoffs, starting guard Cwalina — with a frame similar to Kevin Durant's at 6'6, 200 lbs — needs to build on his three point shooting prowess to jolt this offense. Joining him in the backcourt is captain Flaks, whose leadership and experience is crucial for this young team. The question fans are asking, however, will Alex Gklaros-Stavropolous '29 make an impact at 6'11? With that added height to the lineup, the Panthers can improve their defensive presence in the paint and create passing lanes on offense.

Key Competitions: Skidmore College (Away– Nov. 14), Trinity College (Home– Jan. 9), Amherst College (Home– Feb. 13)

Women's Squash

Head Coach: Mark Lewis

Athletes to Watch: Sophie Calise '29, Ying Ng '29, and Lillian Showalter '29

Women's squash is poised for another strong season after posting double-digit wins for the third consecutive year and finishing 16th in the nation in the 2024-25 season. This year, the Panthers returned nine players, bolstered by three promising first-years joining the program: Sophie Calise, Ng and Showalter, who will look to make an immediate impact for the Panthers. Leading the charge are senior captains Lindsey Burnham '26, Izzy Ronda '26, and Abbie Peterson '26. Burnham, who competed at the top of the ladder, made history last season by becoming just the third player in program history to earn All-NESCAC First-Team honors three times. Head coach Mark Lewis enters his 11th season just four wins shy of 100 with the women's program. The program also welcomes back Teddy Best '22 as its first full-time assistant coach. The Panthers open their season this Saturday at home against Cornell.

Key Competitions: Bowdoin (Home– Jan. 16), Bates (Home– Jan. 18), Colby (Home– Jan. 18)

Men's Squash

Head Coach: Mark Lewis

Athletes to Watch: Gabe Feinstein '28, Nico Brown '29, David Zhao '27

Middlebury men's squash enters the season with 10 returners and three newcomers, led by veteran captains Caleb Boateng '26, Kian Kardestuncer '26, and Theo Kogan '26. Feinstein returns at the top of the ladder, bringing athleticism, endurance and consistency to the #1 spot. Last season, Feinstein had 11 wins and helped secure the program's first victory over then-#14 University of Rochester. Next on the ladder, #2 Zhao — finally back to full form after injuries — is a sharp, tactical player with great court awareness. Brown slots in at #5 as a well-rounded player who has yet to be tested under pressure. On the coaching side, the Panthers officially welcome assistant coach Teddy Best '22, a Middlebury squash alum who brings recent playing experience and familiarity. He returns as the program's first full-time assistant coach after being a volunteer last season. The team is poised to make strides in a competitive NESCAC field — cheer them on this weekend in their first match of the season, playing Cornell at home on Saturday.

Key Competitions: Dartmouth (Away– Nov. 16), Colby (Home– Jan. 18), Amherst (Away– Feb. 8)

Women's Indoor Track & Field

Head Coach: Martin Beatty

Athletes to Watch: Julia Tulimieri '26, Emily Rubio '26, Annelise Jensen '29

Although the indoor season for Middlebury's track & field program is often a prelude to the spring, the women's team can still enter the season with confidence after an impressive campaign last winter. The team broke three school records at the DIII New England Championship meet, and sent six athletes to the NCAA Indoor Championships. At the meet, Rubio topped her previous school record in the pentathlon and earned All-American honors. Thrower Tulimieri also posted an impressive string of results during the season, earning numerous wins in the shot put. However, with standout runner Audrey MacLean '27 going abroad, the Panthers will need to fill in the gaps left in her absence. The talented mid-distance and distance squad can hope for some breakout performances, including from Jensen in her debut indoor season.

Key Competitions: Middlebury's Luke Hotte Field and Track Meet (Home– Jan. 24), Middlebury's New England Small College Invitational (Hosted in Boston– Feb. 1), DIII Indoor New England Championships (Away– Feb. 27-28)

Men's Indoor Track & Field

Head Coach: Martin Beatty

Athletes to Watch: Donnell Harvey Jr. '28, Zach Utz '26, Emerson Kington '28

Numerous school records fell for the men's track & field team last winter, including the long jump, triple jump, high jump, 4x800 meter relay, 4x200 meter relay, 3000 meter run, 60-meter dash, shot put, pole vault, and heptathlon. With a fresh record board and numerous top-performing returners, the men's team begins the indoor campaign with high expectations. Harvey Jr. will look to build on a slew of historic performances in the 60-meter dash— a race held exclusively during the indoor season— while Utz can ride the momentum from statement mile performances and distance medley relay contributions last year. Four hundred meter stud Kington, featured in the Panthers' distance medley relay team, also enters the winter on the back of numerous impressive races last year.

Key Competitions: Middlebury's Luke Hotte Field and Track Meet (Home– Jan. 24), Middlebury's New England Small College Invitational (Hosted in Boston– Feb. 1), DIII Indoor New England Championships (Away– Feb. 27-28)

Women's Ice Hockey

Head Coach: Bill Mandigo

Athletes to Watch: Kate Flynn '27, Olivia McManus '27

This season carries special significance as Middlebury women's hockey celebrates the 50th anniversary of its program this year. The team will be looking to fill significant gaps after graduating 10 seniors from last year's roster. Fortunately, the Panthers return key juniors in forward Flynn, and defender McManus, who ranked second and third on the team in points last season. Between the pipes, the Panthers are anchored by goaltender Sophia Will '26, who posted an impressive 1.22 goals-against average last year, ranking third in the NESCAC. With exciting new first-year talent and one of the conference's top goalies, the program has the pieces to reload and compete this season.

Key Competitions: Hamilton (Home– Nov. 14), Panther Cardinal Classic (Home– Nov. 29-30), Amherst (Away– Jan. 17-18)

Men's Ice Hockey

Head Coach: Jack Ceglarski

Athletes to Watch: Luc Malkhassian '29, Revy Mack '27, John Burdett '26

Ever since the 2000s, a golden decade marked by six NESCAC titles and four NCAA tournaments, the men's hockey trophy cabinet has been collecting dust. To shake things up, the Panthers are joined by new assistant head coach, Trent Grimshaw. Grimshaw played collegiate hockey at SUNY Oswego in 2024, and spent last season playing in the Southern Professional Hockey League (SPHL). Another fresh face is forward Malkhassian, who has made a strong impression in practice on some of his teammates. He'll be joined up front by Mack, who notched 21 points last season, the most from any current player. Holding down the defense is Burdett, a staple of the program since he came to Middlebury four years ago. This new blend of coaches and players will head north to Bowdoin on Saturday to begin their championship quest. Will this be the season men's hockey reopen their trophy cabinet?

Key Competitions: Bowdoin (Away-- Nov. 14), Tufts (Away– Nov. 22) Hobart (Home– Jan. 3)

Women's Alpine Skiing

Head Coach: Abby Copeland

Athletes to Watch: Kjersti Moritz '28, Sophia Tozzi '26, Henriette Borgia '28

Over the summer, former head coach Stever Bartlett stepped down from Middlebury's alpine ski program after 18 seasons marked by NCAA titles and carnival wins. The team will begin an exciting new chapter with head coach Abby Copeland, who has served as the associate head coach since 2016;she brings extensive knowledge of the program and the ability to build on Middlebury's rich skiing history. For the women's alpine team, they enter the season with even more to look forward to. Moritz, the EISA Rookie of the Year and a top-10 finisher for the U.S. Ski Team at the FIS Alpine Junior World Championships last year, returns for her second season. Borgia and Tozzi will also be key members of the women's downhill squad, earning 24th and 27th respectively in the giant slalom at the EISA Championship.

Key Competitions: Vermont Carnival (Away– Feb. 6-7), Middlebury Carnival/EISA Championships (Home– Feb. 20-21), NCAA Skiing Championships (Away– Mar. 11-14)

Men's Alpine Skiing

Head Coach: Abby Copeland

Athletes to Watch: Nicholas Unkovskoy '27, Dominic Shackleton '28, Milan Novak '28

Following the graduation of star skier Bradshaw Underhill '25, the men's alpine ski team will rely on their returners and incoming talent for renewed presence at the top of the field. Unkovskoy will be crucial in their pursuit, recording 13th in the giant slalom at the NCAA Skiing Championships and earning EISA second team honors. Shackleton was also a standout performer for the Panthers last year, representing Great Britain at the FIS Alpine Junior World Ski Championships with numerous strong runs down the mountain. Finally, Novak will look to build on a strong first season, boasting a top-20 finish in the slalom at Middlebury's home carnival. Middlebury's home competition will also be especially exciting this year, doubling as the college's classic winter carnival and the EISA Regional Championships.

Key Competitions: Dartmouth Carnival (Away– Jan. 30-31), Middlebury Carnival/EISA Championships (Home– Feb. 20-21), NCAA Skiing Championships (Away– Mar. 11-14)

Women's Nordic Skiing

Head Coach: Andrew Johnson

Athletes to Watch: Shea Brams '26, Maggie Wagner '26, Sofia Scirica '27

Middlebury's women's nordic team heads into the season fired up about returning to the snow and representing the panther logo. They enter the campaign with a roster ready to race, led by Brams in her senior season. Coming off a sixth-place individual finish at the EISA Championship and ninth in the 20k freestyle at the NCAA Championships, Brams earned All-American honors to cap off an impressive campaign. Wagner will also look to assist the Panthers towards the front, achieving fourth in the sprint at Middlebury's home carnival and 23rd in the 20k freestyle at the NCAA Championships last year. In the same race, Scirica finished in 27th, also recording numerous strong results throughout the season. The team can look forward to Senior Nationals in early January, and hopes to carry a full squad to the NCAA Championships in Bozeman, MT to conclude the season.

Key Competitions: U.S. Cross-Country National Championships (Away– Jan. 1-9), Middlebury Carnival/EISA Championships (Home– Feb. 20-21), NCAA Skiing Championships (Away– Mar. 11-14)

Men's Nordic Skiing

Head Coach: Andrew Johnson

Athletes to Watch: Mason Wheeler '26, Benjamin Jenkin '28, Peter Warner '27

Returning five NCAA qualifiers, multiple experienced veteran skiers, and welcoming the biggest first-year class in years, the men's Nordic skiing team has the tools to build on Middlebury's Nordic skiing legacy this season. The squad is deep— a good day for any of the Panthers' skiers could mean a breakout scoring performance, and their incoming class of six only adds to their versatility. Wheeler enters the season off the back of a 10th-place individual finish at the EISA Championship and sixth in the sprint at the Middlebury Carnival. Jenkin impressed at the Dartmouth Carnival, earning 35th in the 7.5k individual race. Also at the Dartmouth Carnival, Warner achieved 21st in the 20k mass start, eight spots behind Wheeler. Both of Middlebury's Nordic skiing teams will additionally battle for spots at the variety of international races, including World Juniors, U23s, and the World Cup.

Key Competitions: U.S. Cross-Country National Championships (Away– Jan. 1-9), Middlebury Carnival/EISA Championships (Home– Feb. 20-21), NCAA Skiing Championships (Away– Mar. 11-14)

Women's Swimming and Diving

Head Coach: Bob Rueppel

Athletes to Watch: Anna McGrew '28, Hannah Baumgartner '26, Emma Hall '26

Kicking off their season this Saturday at Connecticut College, the women's swimming and diving team begins the season with strong returners and seven incoming athletes. McGrew will be pivotal for the Panthers, entering her second year after a standout rookie season. McGrew's highlights include 12 individual wins, school records in the 100 freestyle and 50 freestyle, and All-American honors. Co-captain Baumgartner will also be key for the Panthers, displaying her strength across the 200, 500 and 800 freestyle last season. Hall, another captain, boasts a sixth-place finish in the 200 breaststroke at the NESCAC Championship, and will help lead the team through the 2025-26 season.

Key Competitions: Connecticut College (Away–- Nov. 15), MIT Invitational (Away– Dec. 5-7), Women's Swimming and Diving NESCAC Championship (Away– Feb. 12-15)

Men's Swimming and Diving

Head Coach: Bob Rueppel

Athletes to Watch: Luke McNamara '26, Andrew Dou '26, John Masiello '27

Also beginning their season at Connecticut College on Saturday, the men's swimming and diving program will enter the pool with a combination of strong returning athletes and first-year talent. The team will turn to co-captain McNamara for leadership and strong performances, returns with school records in the 200 and 400 individual medley, along with All-NESCAC honors. Dou will be another important swimmer for the Panthers, displaying his speed in the butterfly as a member of a program record-setting 200 medley relay. Masiello also comes off a successful previous season, making the NCAA 'B' cut time in the 100 breaststroke and tallying three individual victories.

Key Competitions: Connecticut College (Away–- Nov. 15), MIT Invitational (Away– Dec. 5-7), Men's Swimming and Diving NESCAC Championship (Away– Feb. 19-22)